



*A guide on
how to make
your church
disability
friendly*

Everybody Welcome

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Printed by Ultimo Group of Companies
Revised edition 2020

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About us

Elevate Christian Disability Trust (formerly Christian Ministries with Disabled Trust) is an interdenominational, registered charitable trust.

For over 40 years we have worked to encourage and support both the local church and people living with disability. We seek to achieve this through our various ministry groups throughout New Zealand, camps, a quarterly Encourager magazine, training, speaking in churches and resources such as this one. The Elevate National Support office is in Auckland, New Zealand.



CFFD



JOY
MINISTRY



TORCH



EMMANUEL



DROP IN
CENTRE

Our ministry groups include:

- CFFD for those living with physical disabilities
- Joy Ministries for those living with an intellectual disability
- Torch for people who are blind or have a visual impairment
- Emmanuel Support for families who have children living with disabilities
- The Drop in Centre in Auckland



Introduction

“This booklet is about how you can make your church more friendly towards people with disabilities, and therefore to all people.”

Thank you for obtaining a copy of “Everybody Welcome”. We pray that it will be a valuable resource in your church, and a starting point, in making everything you do friendly to all people.

In New Zealand, people with disabilities make up 24% of the population. That is a total of 1.1 million people (statistics taken from the New Zealand Census, 2013).

66% of this group have a physical disability. The majority of these people have more than one disability. You may not be aware of this large group of people. In our work with churches we have not found this group of people to be proportionately present in the church. Many of these people are not able to attend church because of the barriers they face getting to and into the church. This booklet is about how you can make your church more friendly towards people with disabilities, and therefore to all people. We are urging churches to make a commitment to include people with disabilities in all aspects of church life.

Churches are not expected to produce a perfectly accessible church, as this may be nearly impossible. We would just like you to be open to ideas and change.

Karen Jack, Compiler and Author of “Everybody Welcome”

Why churches need to be disability friendly

What is a “disability”?

A disability is an impairment that limits a person's major life activities, or the management of various essential aspects of life. The stereotype of disability involving people using a wheelchair represents only a small percentage of the disabled population.

Generally speaking, disabilities can be separated into the following five main areas:

1. Physical Impairment
2. Visual Impairment
3. Hearing Impairment
4. Intellectual Impairment
5. Mental Illness

These are the sub group headings we have used throughout the booklet. You can find further definitions of these and specific conditions in the Appendix.

Disabilities may exist from birth, or be acquired throughout one's lifetime from medical conditions or accidents. Many are age-related. Some are temporary, while others are permanent. Some are visible, and others are not. All impairments are therefore quite varied.

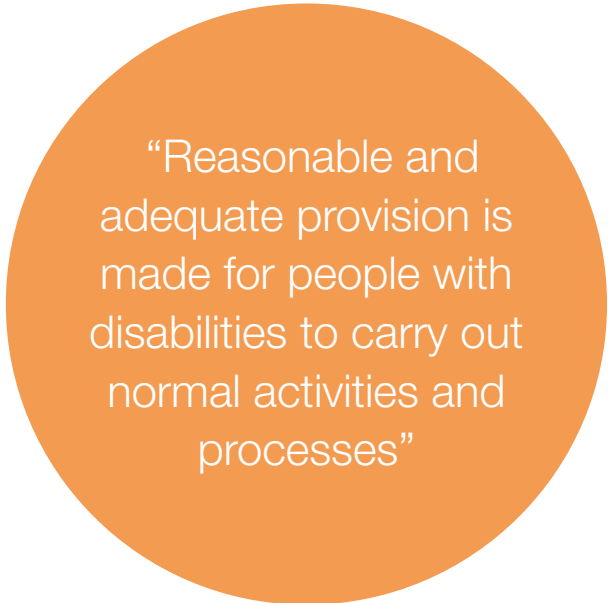
We also need to be mindful that there are now more people in our communities with disabilities than ever before. This is mostly due to advances in medicine, the result being that people now live longer. So as you can see, disability in its widest sense is not age-specific, gender-specific or culturally specific. None of us can guarantee that we will not be affected by disability at some point in our lifetime. In fact it is highly likely we will be if we live to an old age.

What does legislation state?

The Building Act 1991 requires that “reasonable and adequate provision is made for people with disabilities to carry out normal activities and processes” in any buildings where the public are admitted with or without payment. This includes churches, chapels and places of public worship.

Any church buildings erected or modified after this date must meet the requirements of this Building Act, and the Building Regulations of 1992. However, many church buildings were built before the Building Act of 1991 was legislated and therefore are not legally bound by it.

These regulations state that people with disabilities must be able to carry out normal activities, functions and processes within buildings. No building consent will be granted for the alteration of an existing building unless the Territorial Authority is satisfied that the alteration will meet access and facility needs of people with disabilities as is reasonably practicable. The Human Rights Act is also legislation that the church needs to comply with. It is unlawful and discriminatory for service providers (which includes churches) to treat people with disabilities less favourably than others for a reason related to their disability.



“Reasonable and adequate provision is made for people with disabilities to carry out normal activities and processes”

What does the Bible say?

Everybody is created and valued by God

Our starting point is that God made all people in His image (*Gen 1:27*). This includes people with disabilities. When the Bible says we are made in God's image it isn't talking about physically (*John 1:14 & Phil 2:6,7*). This means the degree that we bear His image is not affected by disability. We all equally bear His image. To state the obvious, this includes people with disabilities.

God loves everyone (*John 3:16*). "Everyone" therefore must include people with disabilities. *1 John 3:1* tells us that God loves us so much, that He calls us His own children! People with disabilities are His children too, and He values and loves them as much as any other person (*Luke 12:6-7*). Because God loves and values all people, we should too (*John 13*). In *Exodus 4* we see a discourse between God and Moses. Moses was telling God that He could not possibly use him because he had a speech impediment i.e. a disability. God's response tells us a lot about how He sees people with disabilities. He says "Who makes mouths?...Who makes people so they can speak or not speak, hear or not hear, see or not see? Is it not I the Lord?..." Here God clearly states that sometimes He makes people with disabilities. Although people may judge others on their outward appearances, God judges us

by our thoughts and motives (*1 Samuel 16:7*). God sees what is on the inside, and we should try to look at people the same way. People with disabilities are equal in every way to the non-disabled. In God's eyes, people with disabilities are not at all inferior to people who are able-bodied.

People with disabilities are some of the poorest and most disadvantaged socially in our society and around the world. *Proverbs 22:22-23* shows God's heart for the poor. It states that He defends them and He will protect them. People with disabilities often suffer from low self-esteem and loneliness. They also may have to deal with the very real issues of loss, grieving and rejection. They need God. As Christ would do, we should esteem those who suffer from low self-esteem, loneliness, grief and rejection.

Everybody needs salvation

Jesus died for everyone (*2 Cor 5:15*). The good news of salvation through His death is for everybody (*Romans 3:23*). *John 3:16* says "For God so loved the world that He sent His Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life". This is an inclusive faith excluding nobody. God desires that not one person should perish (*2 Peter 3:9*).

Through the parable of the Great Banquet in *Luke 14*, Jesus speaks of inviting people with disabilities to join in on the blessings of the Kingdom of God. We

are all welcomed to Heaven. If God values people with disabilities enough to have them included in His family in heaven, would He not also desire that people with disabilities should be included in His Kingdom on Earth? Consider this: a church not providing access to people with disabilities, is rejecting people with disabilities.

“The problems of disabled people will not be solved by more government programmes or better health care, but by the redemptive power of Jesus Christ demonstrated in His people. We need to remind ourselves again that His strength is made perfect in our weakness.” - Billy Graham.

Everybody has potential for a personal relationship with God

In regards to spirituality, people with disabilities are no different from able-bodied people. God wants all people to live fulfilling lives with a purpose and a plan (*John 10:10; Jeremiah 29:11*). Jesus speaks of being the good shepherd who has come so that His sheep may have an abundant life. Often people with disabilities can become like sheep without a shepherd. It was Jesus' command to make disciples of every nation by teaching them His commands (*Matt 8:19*). Teaching requires that the recipient of the information can understand what is being taught. Hearing impairment prevents the recipient from hearing the sermon. Intellectual impairment prevents

the recipient from understanding the message if it is too complex.

It is essential to find alternative means to effectively teach people with a range of disabilities in a way that they will understand.

Think about this - by simplifying the message, this will mean that everybody else will be able to understand the message more easily, and it will be more memorable as well.

Everybody has something to contribute

1 Corinthians 12 highlights that it is necessary for there to be many parts in the church, each different from each other. It is in the unity of the body that there is wholeness, not in the greatness of a few parts. We are told to have equal concern for each other. In fact, we are told that the people we think are weaker, God considers indispensable. Even if someone feels that they don't belong and are not a part of the body, they still are. We need all the parts of the body for the church to be whole.

Are our churches places where we can all contribute? In our congregations, is their equal concern for each other? Do we ensure that everyone knows they are a part of the body or do our actions (or inactions) say 'I don't need you'? The way that we structure our meetings or church



“We have seen that God values all people the same, that Jesus includes people with disabilities in His kingdom, and legislation states we should have accessible churches.”

services can make it difficult for some people to participate. There may be predetermined roles, structures and processes within a church that may make it difficult for a person with a disability to contribute. As each of us is a necessary part, it is important to consider how we can enable and encourage all people to be a part of the body of Christ. Perhaps we need more flexibility in how a person can contribute. Maybe there needs to be a change in how things are run or something needs to be adapted. Perhaps we even need to reconsider what we think the parts of the body of Christ are.

Conclusion

We have seen that God values all people the same, that Jesus includes people with disabilities in His kingdom, and legislation states we should have accessible churches. As far as legislation is concerned, we believe that church accessibility should be viewed as a moral responsibility, rather than a legal liability, ultimately benefiting the church and the kingdom of God.

Perhaps the only thing holding you back from pursuing a disability accessible church is the thought of the cost of the physical modifications, and a lack of knowledge about what would make your church more disability friendly.

These barriers are easy to remedy. Read on to equip yourself with this knowledge.

Barriers to Inclusion

If barriers to participation exist, people are less likely to view attending church as a viable option. This will in turn limit the demand and expectations. You may not see the need to make your church disability friendly because people living with disability may see too many barriers to attend in the first place.

Let's look at the parable of the Great Banquet in Luke 14 again. After the servant was sent to 'Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame', there was still room. We can assume that the servant would have asked as many people as he could so that there was no room left. His master was already angry, and he would not have wanted to further anger him. The master then sent the servant out to compel the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame to come. Many of these people would have been without incomes, reliant on others generosity for food, shelter and clothing. It is highly likely these people would have been hungry but many of them didn't accept the first invitation to come to a banquet. The servant had to go back and compel them to come.

For the poor and disabled in this parable, there would have been barriers to them accepting the invite. One of the biggest barriers was most likely that they didn't feel that they would be welcome. For people living with disability today, there are many barriers to attending church. Attitudes, Structure, and Communication are three categories of barriers that people with disabilities can encounter when attending a church.

Attitudinal barriers:

Generally, society's beliefs and attitudes about disability do not line up with the biblical perspective. It is easy for us to not be aware of wrong attitudes or beliefs we hold until we are faced with them. People with disabilities may feel judged as lesser human beings by the congregation and are therefore left out of aspects of church life. This barrier of wrong attitudes towards people with disabilities is subtle. It requires education and work to overcome. It is people's attitudes that make a real difference. If a church genuinely wants to be inclusive of people

with disabilities, it will find a way around any practical challenges. The essential attitude towards people, including those with disabilities, is love, acceptance, compassion and understanding.

Structural barriers:

People with disabilities often cannot get into or around the church building. Structural barriers include a lack of accessibility and usability to facilities necessary for church involvement. Areas requiring access and usability include all church buildings used by the congregation. These may




include the toilet, the kitchen, and the pulpit. Structure is the most visible barrier. It is also the easiest barrier to understand, and perhaps the most expensive to counteract. When done well, the modifications can be invisible, and will be a benefit to all.

Communicational barriers:

People with disabilities may not be able to benefit from the worship or the message, because they cannot hear it, or understand it. This can be because of the complexity of the message or the way the message is presented. Though the methodology may have to be adapted for each person to understand, the basics of the Christian faith such as concepts of sin, repentance, forgiveness and salvation can still be taught in an understandable way.

Conclusion

The following sections give you a starting point for becoming a disability friendly church and some suggestions on specific considerations by impairment category. We recommend you read through these before completing the Church Assessment as it will help you have a picture of what you may need to address in the process of becoming disability friendly.



“If barriers to participation exist, people are less likely to view attending church as a viable option”

How to be inclusive of people with disabilities

Ministry and Prayer

Inclusive language

Supporting the grieving

Contributing to church life

Showing love

Families

Ministry and prayer

When you think about ministering to a person with a disability, you may have emotions of fear and anxiety because of your lack of experience, and your desire to be effective. Feeling helpless does not mean that you are helpless. Remember that the person with a disability is a person. Counselling them will be very similar to counselling anyone else.

A good place to start is to ask the Holy Spirit for guidance and if there are any personal attitudes or beliefs you may need to address in yourself. For example, if you hold the belief that people with disabilities are a liability, you will inevitably communicate this to the individual, the family and the congregation. Ensure you have a positive attitude towards people with disabilities.

Help guide people through the valleys. Often there is anger and resentment toward God and others. There may also be sensations of guilt, unworthiness and despondency, which demand patience and encouragement. Do not try to defend God – He is the sovereign Lord of the universe; He doesn't need defending!

When you are praying for a person, first ask what they want prayer for. Do not assume it is their disability. Make sure you follow-up on whatever help you offer, and do what you say you will do. People with disabilities may well have had many broken promises by well-intending people. This can be particularly true for people with intellectual impairment or multiple disabilities.

Keep in mind the following biblical truths:

- We are all made in the image of God and this is where our value and worth are found, not our ability, our looks or what we do.

- We need to view life and people from the point of eternity. Our bodies are not eternal. Therefore, our focus should not be on this. Not that we aren't to address this, particularly if the person wants to, but focusing on the physical should never be at the detriment of the spiritual or emotional issues that may need to be addressed.
1 Samuel 16:7 'For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.'

- We are the body of Christ. Each of us has something to contribute and none of us are indispensable.

“We are the body of Christ. Each of us has something to contribute and none of us are indispensable.”

“When you are praying for a person, first ask what they want prayer for.”

If communication needs to be considered, equip yourself with the knowledge of how to communicate with the person first. Their family or caregiver should be able to give you some advice. Consider whether you will need someone else there to help interpret for you. But make sure you are talking to the person, not the interpreter.

Use language that shows respect, and that emphasizes the individual as being worthwhile. Try to avoid using clichés.

Consider the following:

Do Use

“I’m not sure why God has not healed you. There are some things we may not find out this side of heaven. But I do know this. We can always trust God.”

“You have experienced an incredible loss. I am so sorry.”

“I don’t understand what God is doing in this. I will pray that you will feel God’s sustaining love and comfort.”

“I am not sure why God has allowed you to have a child with a disability, but I do know He will help you face anything you may go through in life.”

Don’t Use

“If your faith had been stronger, you would have been healed long ago.”

“There’s always somebody who is worse off. Just think about the man in this morning’s paper!”

“God must have a reason for this tragedy happening to you and your family. But, God never gives us more than we can bear.”

“You must be very special parents.”

Inclusive Language

Choice of language is important when talking to anybody, and this includes people with disabilities.

The most important aspect in your language is your attitude. That will come across in the words that you choose to use. There are some words you can choose to use that will convey a positive message when communicating with a person with a disability. Be aware that appropriate language does continue to change over time. The simplest way to know which language to use is to ask the person themselves.

The following are guidelines only. Generally speaking, the language below shows respect, dignity and puts the emphasis on the person, rather than the disability. A good point to remember too is that the tone of your voice also conveys a positive or negative attitude.

- The important thing is not to reinforce negative images and stereotypes associated with disability. In general, people with disabilities are not worried about the words that you use, but rather the attitude you express toward them.

- Don't worry about using expressions such as "See what I mean?" with someone who is blind, or "Let's go for a walk" to someone in a wheelchair. These are part of our everyday language and are not offensive.

- Choose language that affirms, rather than degrades. Typically people would rather dwell on their strengths than their weaknesses. They do not want pity, or to be unduly glorified for "courageously" coping with everyday life.

- Some people may have difficulty with speech and this may mean conversation with them is limited to daily needs. Try to discuss a range of topics such as weather, family, sports, news, entertainment and hobbies. This makes for a much more interesting conversation for both parties.

- More often than not, people do not want to be asked personal and intrusive questions.

Do Use

"Person with a disability" or "Person with access needs"

"Wheelchair user" or "Uses a wheelchair"

"A person with..."

"Intellectual disability" or "Learning disability"

"Hearing impaired" or "Hard of hearing"

Don't Use

"Handicap", "Retard", "Cripple", "Invalid"

"Wheelchair bound", "Confined to a wheelchair"

"Suffering from...", "A victim of...", "Crippled by...", "Arthritic" etc

"Mentally Retarded", "Mentally handicapped"

"Dumb mute"

Supporting the grieving

Many people with disability and their families go through periods of grieving. For parents, this will likely be at the time of diagnosis, when milestones are not reached as expected, and at significant times in a child's life, such as starting and leaving school. For the person with the disability the process of grieving can be ongoing throughout their life, possibly around traditional milestones in life but also at any time.

There are some things that you may think are true, but they may not be helpful in the early stages of the grieving process. Be aware of and sensitive to the grieving process, just as you would when providing pastoral care to people without disabilities who are grieving.

- Call in at the hospital as you are able. If appropriate, and you're able to, offer to be a third party in meetings with medical people, and learn what decisions are to be made by the family. Learn all you can about the disability.

- Share with the family your own initial and genuine feelings of fear. More than likely, they will match the family's initial feelings too. This will help to effectively identify with them and share their grief.

- Suggest guidelines on moral decisions, but realise the final decision is left with the family. Sometimes you need to just listen.

- Give the whole family attention – not just the people with the disability or just their parents. Siblings may feel left out. Include everyone.

- Try not to adopt a self-protecting response – i.e. offering words of concern initially, but moving away because it feels uncomfortable. Pastoral care should be ongoing and regular – being there is very important. The person and their family will need ongoing support.

- However, accept your limitations. You will not be able to “fix” the situation. Don't try and meet all the family's needs yourself, because you will need support and help too. Bring in other people to help as appropriate to the need and situation.

Contributing to church life

God has created every person with different abilities and equipped each Christian with unique spiritual gifts. Therefore, to state the obvious, people with disabilities have skills and abilities to contribute to society and to God's work also. Encouraging people to use their abilities will help them grow in spiritual maturity. People with disabilities could contribute in any area of the church. For some people with more significant intellectual or physical disabilities there may be some things that they are not able to do, but they can still contribute to all aspects of church life, it just might be in a different way.

These might include the following:

- Any aspect!
- Assisting with communion
- Being in the worship team
- Collecting items left in the pews after services
- Collecting the tithes and offerings
- Filling the glass of water for the speaker
- Fundraising
- Giving their testimony
- Greeting at the door
- Helping with admin tasks in the office
- Helping with crèche, Sunday school or youth group
- Leading a home group
- Phoning
- Policy development
- Praying
- Preaching
- Reading scriptures
- Serving in the kitchen
- Taking part in the decision making about modifications to the buildings
- Visiting people

Adults who were born with disabilities may not have been given the same opportunities to volunteer or try something when they were younger. They may not know what aspect of church life they would enjoy contributing to. Perhaps a young person with disability needs extra support to get involved in a particular role. Maybe someone who has an intellectual disability has been told they don't have anything to offer, or that someone else can do it better, or they have lived in an institution their whole lives and not had the opportunity to serve others. Or maybe someone who has a disability already knows what their skills are, is using them in their workplace but has never been asked to get involved at church.

We would encourage you to get alongside people, have a conversation about what they enjoy, what skills they have, and help them find a place in the church where they can contribute and give back. It might mean someone taking on the role of mentoring that person while they learn how to be a part of the team they are in. It might mean a couple of people need to sit down with the person to plan how to make it work. Some people might need to try a few different things before they find what really fits them.

Being able to participate and contribute is important for all of us. Serving is after all a fundamental aspect of God's kingdom.

“Being able to participate and contribute is important for all of us. Serving is after all a fundamental aspect of God's kingdom.”

Showing Love

The practical support one person needs or wants from the church will look different to someone else. Keep in mind that receiving practical help should be one aspect of a person being part of a church. Please make sure you are not viewing a person with disability only as someone to help or care for. As with everyone in your church there may be seasons where more support is needed and some support will be more appropriate than other support. The key is for practical support to be one aspect of people with disability being in the church, but not the only aspect .

Here are a few ideas of ways to practically show love to people living with a disability and their families.

- **Offering practical assistance:** Shopping, housework, meals, financial management, transport, washing, ironing, minor repair jobs, gardening, washing windows, etc

- **Making something for them:** Knitting, sewing, mending, alterations, baking, a meal, etc

- **Teaching people to use their own skills - employment or recreation:** Gardening, sewing, knitting, embroidery, music, computing, etc

- **Phone-calls:** Give them a vital link to the world outside their house.

- **Visiting and encouraging:** Allow plenty of time, and check when it is convenient to visit. Offer to read their mail out to them, or update them with the news. If conversation tends to focus on self-pity, redirect the conversation away from themselves and onto others.

- **Providing hospitality:** Invite them over for a cup of tea, take them out for a meal or a drive, have them to stay overnight in your house...

- **Praying with them:** Invite people to pray for your needs or the needs of the church and it's members. People don't need to be able to speak well, or even at all, to heard by God.

- **Contribute material things or financial aid:** Living on the disability benefit leaves very little left over to spend on luxuries or even necessities.

- **Put people in contact with relevant health and disability agencies.**

- **Invite people to social and recreational activities.**

- **Respite:** Allow caregivers to have an evening out every now and then.

“Someone who will listen
and not be judgemental
is invaluable.”

- **Assist with finding meaningful employment:**
This will do more for their dignity, self-esteem and personal development than you'll ever know. You could also let them know of night courses of interest to them.

- **Write a letter:** Send them books and articles you think they would like. Encourage them to write letters of encouragement to others as well.

- **Be an advocate:** Assist on their behalf as they seek housing, employment, social activities, etc

- **Offer transport to medical appointments and church.**

- **Offer friendship:** Someone who will listen and not be judgemental is invaluable.

Families

When a member of a family has a disability the whole family is affected. If a child has a disability, both parents and siblings are impacted, and in different ways. If a parent has a disability, this is also true for the spouse and children.

When a child, parent or spouse requires additional care due to a disability, often one of the family members takes on the role of fulltime carer. This could involve coordinating medical appointments and medication, coordinating paid carers (if they are able to access support workers), assisting with personal cares, daily therapy exercises, coordinating transport, activities or hobbies and so much more. This is on top of normal household chores, grocery shopping, cooking, and all the challenges and blessings that being a family brings.

Understandably many carers are under a lot of stress and very rarely get time to themselves. Funding for respite and carer support may be available but often it is difficult to find appropriate carers and there is a huge lack of respite services available in New Zealand. Many families never use their full amount of allocated hours.

When disability occurs, it can change dynamics and roles within the family. This is not only in regards to the person taking on the role of main carer but also other family members. Siblings or children may take on a carer role or more responsibility with household chores. Spouses may need to readjust their roles

within the marriage as well. These changes are not necessarily bad, but they are different. They require a period of adjustment which can be yet another thing to deal with when so many other things may also be changing.

The time and effort required when dealing with all that a disability brings can make it difficult to meet the needs of other family members and can put strain on relationships.

Every person is individual and how they respond or experience a situation may be quite different than other family members. Some may adapt quite easily to changes while others may find it much harder and continue to struggle with changes. Some may find one particular change more difficult than another change. Emotions and stages of grieving may vary significantly, both in regards to what is felt, when it is felt and the degree of intensity it is felt.

Support for families is vital. People will offer support at the time of initial diagnosis or injury but most often this support dwindles after a while. Families need ongoing support, both the person with the disability and the other family members. This includes practical support, prayer, a listening and understanding ear, babysitting, support to allow the main carer to have some time away, and friendships that are non-judgemental.

Addressing Barriers

How to begin addressing barriers

After reading the previous sections you will have realised that there are some barriers in your church for people living with disability. You may have already identified some easy changes but you may also have realised that there are some barriers that are bigger and won't be quick fixes. That's okay, becoming a welcoming church is a journey. The important thing is that you start. There is not a right or wrong way to journey towards a church where all people can belong.

Accessibility Audit

We recommend you take the time to undertake an audit of your church. This will give you a clear picture of where there are barriers and what needs to be addressed first. We have created an Accessibility Audit which can be completed as a whole, by barrier category or for each programme/ministry area within your church. Download a free copy from our website: www.elevatecdt.org.nz

You may prefer to have only the church staff complete certain aspects of the audit, have a few relevant people assigned to oversee the audit or get a project group together. However you decide to complete the audit, it is important to include people living with disability in this process. If you are looking to get a group of people together to not only complete the audit but also begin planning how to address the barriers we would suggest gathering a group with a variety of skills and roles within the church. This might include, the church leader, ministry group leaders, people with disabilities, carers, someone with building or architectural

skills, someone with IT or AV skills, someone with fundraising skills, etc.

Addressing barriers to access or inclusion will need to be an ongoing consideration. It would be good to define the purpose of a project group before starting, how long you plan to spend auditing the church and if the group will continue meeting long term. Decide if the group is responsible for providing church leadership with recommendations or if the decision makers are part of the group. Having a plan in place before starting will help clarify roles within the process and ensure people are on the same page.

Attitude

Attitudinal barriers can often be the hardest to address but are the most important. They aren't as easy to define as barriers that are physical so this will take time.



Disability Awareness Sunday

In New Zealand, Disability Awareness Sunday (DAS) is observed on the third Sunday in June. It is a good opportunity

to create conversation around disability. We have further resources available online to help you with ideas and content. It is worth noting that holding one service a year will not remove all the barriers that may be present. Disability Awareness Sunday can be one tool of many that may help your church in its journey.

Speakers and Seminars

Holding a special meeting or seminar is a great way to educate and address attitudinal barriers.

You could organise for a speaker who lives with a disability to share, perhaps there is someone within your church you could ask. We run an annual Disability Awareness Seminar in Auckland and on request can individually tailor a seminar for a church group. Please contact us if you would like to invite our team to run a seminar or if you would like to be put in touch with a recommended speaker near you.

Spend Time Together

The best way to break down attitudinal barriers is for people to spend time together. If there are people in your church who have a disability, ask them if they would be willing to meet with you to talk. There are many different groups around New Zealand providing opportunities to volunteer alongside a person with a disability. Our regional groups and camps are always welcoming of volunteers as we know conversations and time spent together help break down barriers.

Structure

Structural barriers can exist both within the physical building and within the structure of programmes and services. Addressing these barriers will require the church to invest financially but it is worth the investment.

Building and Property

You are permitted to view and print The New Zealand Standards for Design for Access and Mobility free of charge for your own use from www.standards.govt.nz. These minimum standards are accepted as meeting compliance with the NZ Building Code 1991. Best practice may exceed these standards. In the Appendix we have provided a list of free online resources and guidelines to help you address structural barriers within your buildings.

There may be professionals within your church willing to donate their time and skills to help make the modifications needed to remove structural access barriers. This is particularly great if there are small modifications needed or modifications in just one area, such as a ramp. If your church is considering a new build or is undertaking a significant renovation it is important to incorporate accessibility from the start. We would recommend investing in the services of professionals. Good design will incorporate accessibility as part of the design rather than an add



on that looks out of place. Two organisations we can recommend are:

Barrier Free - www.barrierfree.org.nz

Provide accessibility assessment and audits, technical advice throughout a project.

be.lab - www.belab.co.nz

The Be. Welcome access team will develop an individualized plan for you. Services can include assessments, workshops, design plan accessibility reviews, digital accessibility reviews and event reviews.

Programme and Ministry Areas

As we have highlighted in previous sections, love and kindness go a long way in being welcoming to people who live with disabilities. There is still a need to equip people within your church who are providing programmes or specialized support for people. For example, a children's programme leader can love and show kindness to a child living with ASD but without tools and techniques may struggle to know how to teach them about God.

It's important for the orientation and training of your ministry teams to include relevant information on how to support someone with a disability. This includes the children's ministry team, worship team, ushers and carparking team, prayer team, café, etc. If you decided to gather a group of people to audit the church and address barriers they will be able to

help identify what information needs to be included or where further specialized training may be needed.

The programme or ministry leaders need to be involved in conversations and planning for their area. They will be the ones to implement changes and they are the ones who will know their teams and tasks the teams do.

It is also important that people with disability have the opportunity to volunteer. Perhaps your church already has a person, or a process, to help people find a place in the church they can get involved in. This person should be equipped to help people with disability find how and where they can contribute to the church. The most important aspect of this is to talk with the person who wants to volunteer. Together they can work out what support may be needed and how they will address any barriers that assist.

Refer to the Appendix for a list of seminars and courses we recommend.

Communication

Communication is essential to connecting with people and building relationships. Everything we do relies on the ability to communicate, which is why it is important for your church to address communication barriers.

The best place to start addressing barriers in communication is to have conversations with people

in your church who live with disability. Organise to meet up for coffee or invite them over for dinner. Take time to have honest conversations about how welcoming the church currently is, how included the person feels, and what things the church can do to build a welcoming church. If there are barriers to communicating make sure you also extend the invitation to someone who can help you and them talk. Perhaps they have a family member who can come with them or perhaps there is a friend in the church who can help.

We provide a free resource booklet on communication which can be downloaded from our website.

Refer to the Appendix for a list of:

- Guidelines and resources to create accessible print material and online content
 - Courses and training
-

The following pages list some of the key considerations and suggestions to removing barriers within the church. These are categorised by impairment.

Physical Impairment

Attitude

- Be creative when considering church related practices such as baptisms and communion. For example, have the option of communion in their seat rather than kneeling at the front of the church. Take communion to those who find it difficult to carry the emblems and check if they require assistance with consuming them.

- If people are unable to attend church, look at how you can utilize technology to record or livestream the service. Offer communion at home. Mention them at meetings or home groups so people are aware and do not forget about them. Perhaps invite them to write something for the bulletin like a testimony or poem.

- Make sure people on welcoming or ushering know what accessible facilities and resources are available. People will feel welcomed knowing the church has taken time to plan with them in mind.

- Remember the needs of caregivers and family members who miss out on church – perhaps someone could take over the care-giving every now and then to enable them to get to church.

Structure

- Provide sign-posted mobility parking spaces close to, and with no barriers to, the accessible entrance.

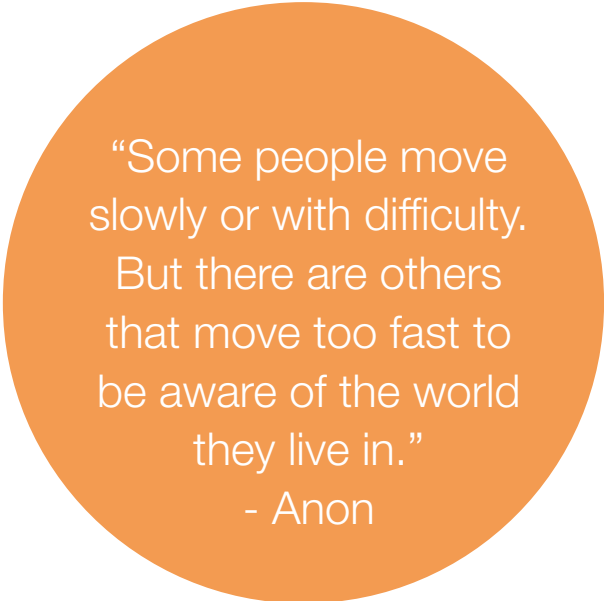
- Provide a transport roster that rotates among a pool of trained drivers. You could consider providing a van with wheelchair lift.

- All internal and external access needs to be level or ramped and have light-weight doors. Provide handrails to assist those using the steps or ramps.

- Consider where seating is provided and the type of seats. For example, seats near the entrance for people who have difficulty walking and seats with arm rests for people who find it difficult to stand from a chair.

- Wheelchair accessible toilets are essential.

- People who use wheelchairs, or people who cannot stand for long, may wish to sit where they can see what is being presented on the screen, even when people around them stand up. This may not necessarily be at the front. Remember to give people choice. An alternative is to have some printed copies of the songs.



“Some people move slowly or with difficulty. But there are others that move too fast to be aware of the world they live in.”
- Anon

- Be open to having home groups meet at church or other accessible venues.
-

- People in wheelchairs do not necessarily want to be sitting in the middle of the aisle drawing attention to themselves – remove a chair so they feel part of the congregation and can sit with their friends and family without standing out.
-

Communication

- Be patient and allow extra time when talking with someone who has difficulty with speech.
-
- Send an electronic copy of handouts or worksheets before a meeting for people who have difficulty holding paper and pen.
-
- Make use of email and texts to communicate with people who have difficulty speaking on the phone.
-
- Use the international symbol around the building to indicate access, such as an accessible entrance or bathroom.
-

Blind and Low Vision

Attitude

- If a person comes to church by themselves ask if there is someone in particular they would like to sit next to, or introduce them to people sitting nearby. They might like to be seated with someone who can offer some assistance, such as telling them when everyone stands up or sits back down.

- Be aware that it can be difficult to find someone to talk to during fellowship times, which can leave a person feeling lonely or disconnected. Create opportunities for conversations to take place, such as asking if they want to talk to a particular person and leading them over to that person.

- Offer to assist them with things such as transport to church but don't be offended if the offer is declined as some blind can be very independent.

- When leading a person around, allow them to take your elbow and walk slightly in front of them.

- If someone has a guide-dog, do not touch or distract it as it is working. Some people won't mind if you pat the dog, but you must always ask first.

Structure

- Maintain good lighting for people with partial sight.

- Keep corridors and walkways clear. Make sure there are no projecting signs or overhanging branches that someone could walk into. Advise them if furniture has been moved.


- Provide colour contrast on foot-paths and steps - i.e. white paint on the edges. When redecorating or refurnishing, consider contrasting colours – i.e. black door handles on a white door.

- Ensure signage is accessible. Refer to the Blind Foundations guidelines for details.

Communication

- When greeting, say who you are and shake their hand or touch their shoulder. Make sure they know you are talking to them, and announce when you leave.

- Provide information in alternative formats to ordinary print. These could include large print, Braille or electronic versions.



“Some people are physically blind, but many people in the church are blind to people around them in need.”
- Anon

- **For large print, Bold Arial font size 18 shown here is usually adequate.**

- Check font size, colour contrast and busyness of the background for slides, posters, and documents. For printed material, black on white always works. Matte finish is better than glossy.
-
- Make sure your emails and website are accessible. For example, adding alternative text to images.
-
- If showing something to the congregation, describe it either at the time, or before the service.
-
- There are guidelines and tools available for free online to help you make your website and documents accessible. The Blind Foundation in particular is a great resource for advice, services and resources.
-

Deaf and Hearing Impairment

Attitude

- One to one conversation is preferred over talking in larger groups.

- Be aware that people who are deaf tend to be very direct in conversation – they may not have learnt how to be subtle, as those with hearing have learnt.

- Be patient when communicating with someone who is hearing impaired. If the person doesn't understand what you said, try not to get frustrated. Repeat what you said and if they don't understand try rephrasing it. Writing things out is a good solution, particularly if the environment is noisy. Make use of your cellphone to type.

- Taking the time to learn some NZ sign language (our third official language) will be greatly appreciated by a person who is deaf.

Structure

- Offer seating near the front of the church for those who lip-read, or near loud speakers for those who are hard of hearing.

- Good clear signposting means that they don't have to ask for directions.

- Supply an assistive listening system for those using hearing aids, and test it regularly. Ensure everyone speaking uses the microphone.

Communication

- Provide the main points of the sermon, message or announcements on presentation slides. Use pictures to illustrate the sermon point.

- Use captioning on video clips.

- Supply a written copy of the sermon that can be followed.

- Be aware that background noise can make it difficult for those who use a hearing aid.

- Provide Sign Language interpreters within the service. Interpreters must have a good understanding of the Bible.

- If people are lip reading, try not to turn away from them, put your hands near your face or speak too quickly.
-
- Try not to have a bright source of light directly behind the person speaking – this puts a shadow on their face, and makes lip reading difficult or impossible.
-
- Give as many non-verbal cues as possible by using gestures and facial expression.
-
- Contact people at home using e-mail, text or online messaging apps.
-

“Some people are physically deaf. But some people in God’s family ignore the cries of others.”
- Anon

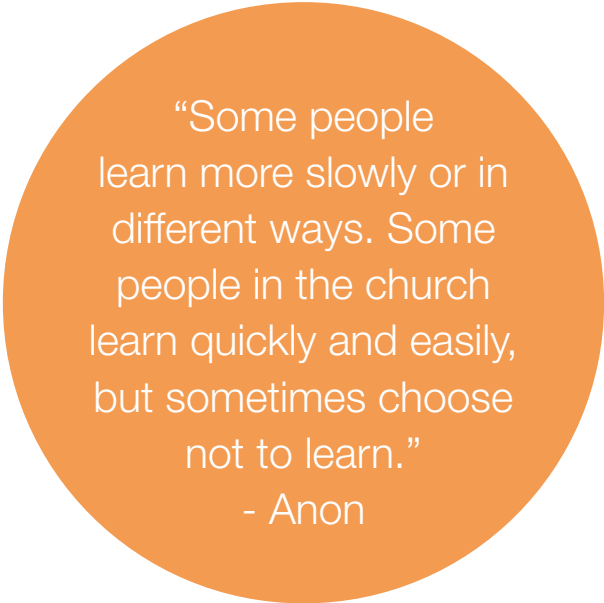
Intellectual Impairment

Attitude

- Although people with intellectual disabilities have varying degrees of intellectual ability, they are not spiritually disabled. Many intellectually disabled people are able to understand Christian theology and teachings, and to have a personal relationship with Jesus.
-
- Treat adults as adults, and children as children. Treat them as you would anyone else. The more you expect of them, the more they will give. Include each person in age appropriate groups wherever possible – they will learn by observation and copying.
-
- Be genuine and respectful.
-
- Consider the length of service and how interactive it is. Often people with intellectual disabilities have a shorter attention span. A service that works on keeping the attention of those with a shorter attention span will benefit everyone else too.
-
- Assign a personal helper for the service.
-
- Provide a transport roster with members who live nearby.
-
- Be patient if individuals are noisy or moving around when it seems inappropriate. Remind them gently of appropriate behaviour if needed but be careful not to discourage expressions of worship or faith. We all have our differences, individual expression is okay.
-
- Make an extra effort to include people with intellectual disabilities in church activities. Genuine friendships go further than only attending service together once a week. Do not feel hurt if they do not respond as expected.
-

Structure

- Sign post facilities using pictorial signs as well as words – this also benefits non-English speaking people.
-
- Hold a small group or separate service which particularly caters to the learning needs of people with an intellectual impairment.
-



“Some people learn more slowly or in different ways. Some people in the church learn quickly and easily, but sometimes choose not to learn.”

- Anon

Communication

- Provide information that is simple, clear, and concise. Focusing on one subject at a time. Use repetition and simple language.

- Try speaking in short segments backed up by a drama, an action song or a video clip with a similar point to reinforce. Engaging more than one of the senses will help with retention. Use vivid examples and visual aids if possible, real life objects work particularly well. This will benefit many others in your congregation as well.

- Include songs with repetitive or simple choruses. This is a great way to learn scripture.

- Make simplified notes in bullet points so that they can go over the sermon in their own time, or in the future.

Appendix

International Access Symbols

Access symbols help people to identify accessible buildings, resources and events. By using these symbols you are communicating both the access features available and that you are welcoming to people who have a disability. You may want to include these symbols, where appropriate, in advertising, newsletters, brochures and signage. It can also be helpful to include some details about what access is available, for example, accessible parking, accessible bathrooms, or large print available on request.



Wheelchair accessibility

Used to indicate access for individuals with limited mobility, including those who use wheelchairs. You might use this to

indicate wheelchair accessible bathrooms, building access, parking spaces, pathways, etc.



Audio description

Those who are blind or have low vision can listen to a description of the visual aspects of the performance during appropriate

breaks in the dialogue.



Large print

Indicated by the words Large Print in 18 pt. or larger text. You might use this on signage, brochures or advertising to indicate what is

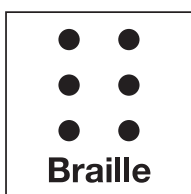
available in large print. Material you could consider putting into large print includes forms, brochures, volunteer rosters, or bible study notes.



Assistive listening systems

Hearing loops, or assistive listening systems, transmit amplified sound via hearing aids, headsets or other devices. These are useful in

auditoriums, theatres and seminar spaces as they eliminate background noise for people who are hard of hearing.



Braille

This symbol indicates that printed material is available in Braille. Blind and Low Vision NZ offer a paid service to put material into Braille.



Captioning (open/closed)

Captioning is text that comes up on the screen with what is said in video, TV or a live performance.

Open captioning is always in view, and cannot be turned off; closed captioning can be activated or deactivated by the viewer. If you have video on your website or social media account there will be options to add captions or subtitles. Captions can also be used with live video.



Sign language interpreted

The sign language interpreting symbol can be used when interpreting is available for audiences.

Disability Information Services

Autism New Zealand

Provides support, information and education on autism spectrum disorders (ASD) for individuals, their family/whanau, caregivers, and professionals who engage with them.

Website: autismnz.org.nz

Blind and Low Vision NZ

Provides information and services for people with visual impairment. Provides guidelines on creating accessible signage buildings, accessible documents and websites.

Phone: 0800 24 33 33

Website: blindlowvision.org.nz

CCS Disability Action

Provides mobility parking cards, Total Mobility vouchers, employment and vocational services, library and information services, supported living services and more.

Phone: 0800 227 2255

Website: ccsdisabilityaction.org.nz

Deaf Aotearoa

Offer a range of services for the Deaf Community, information on New Zealand Sign Language and interpreter booking service.

Phone: 0800 33 23 22

Website: deaf.org.nz

Firstport

New Zealand's national disability information website. Find your local information centre or support service, search latest news and events, or search resources and advice.

Phone: 0800 171 981

Website: firstport.co.nz

Support Groups and Disability Organisations

New Zealand has a large number of support groups and disability organisations throughout the country.

If you are looking for support and information in regards to a particular condition or disability a good place to start is by doing a search on Firstport.

Basic Building Accessibility

The following information has been used with permission from the NZS4121:2001, “New Zealand Standards for Design for Access and Mobility – Buildings and Associated Facilities”. The information selected is only a small part of the standards. You are permitted to view and print this standard free of charge for your own use from www.standards.govt.nz. These minimum standards are accepted as meeting compliance with the NZ Building Code 1991. Best practice may exceed these standards.

Entrances and Doors

- The minimum clear width of a footpath and corridor should be 1200mm.

- The accessible entrance should be made into the main entrance of the building.

- Door handles should be between 900 and 1200mm above the level of the floor. Lever door handles should be used instead of doorknobs.

- The force required to open doors should not be in excess of what is necessary for the function of the door. Ramps should be avoided if it's possible to have level access.

Ramps and Steps

- The total rise of any flight of steps should not exceed 2500 mm.

- Projecting nosing on stairs can cause people to trip.

- Steps should have a maximum step height of 180 mm, and minimum step depth of 310 mm.

- Handrails should be provided on both sides of the steps.

- The *maximum* gradient of a ramp is 1:12. Less gradient than this is better.

- Ramps should be a slip-resistant surface and have handrails both sides.

Refer to NZS 4121:2001 section 6 for further details on specifications

Bathroom Facilities

- The design of toilet facilities is intended to provide for unaided use by a person with a disability.

- An outward opening door or sliding door is preferred for toilet cubicles.

- Accessible toilet cubicles may contain parenting facilities.

- In buildings with fewer than 300 occupants, one all gender toilet is sufficient. The benefit of an all gender toilet is the ability of a helper of the opposite gender to assist.

- Door handles, locks, flushing control and taps, should be lever type, which is beneficial for those with limited coordination or strength of their hands/arms.

Refer to NZS 4121:2001 section 10 for further details on specifications.

Miscellaneous

- Hanging signs should have a minimum clearance of 2000 mm above the ground.

- The optimal chair design has a seat height of 400–450 mm, and has armrests.

- Public counters should have at least one space that can be used by people within wheelchairs

Parking

- Mobility car-parks should be provided and clearly signposted.

- The route between the car-park and the building entrance should be relatively free from obstacles.

Refer to NZS 4121:2001 section 5 for further details on specifications.

Online Resources and Guidelines

Accessible Document Guidelines

Guidelines to create documents that are accessible for people who are blind or have low vision.

Phone: 0800 24 33 33

Website: blindlowvision.org.nz/how-we-can-help/services-for-business/

Accessible Signage Guidelines: Braille, Tactile and Clear Print Fifth Edition (2018)

This expands on requirements of the NZ Standard 4121:2001 and provides best practice for accessible signage for people who are blind or have low vision.

Phone: 0800 24 33 33

Website: blindlowvision.org.nz/how-we-can-help/services-for-business/

Check My Colours

This tool checks foreground and background color combinations to make sure they provide sufficient contrast when viewed by someone having color deficits.

Website: www.checkmycolours.com

Guidelines for Producing Accessible eText

Best practice guidelines for creating electronic text in various formats that is accessible for people with a print disability.

Website: printdisability.org/guidelines/guidelines-for-accessible-e-text-2018/

Homes Without Barriers: A Guide To Accessible Houses

Diagrams and advice to design or alter buildings for people with disabilities. Free pdf download

Website: www.branz.co.nz/hwb

Lifemark

Information and standards on designing buildings for universal design

Phone: 0800 227 888

Website: <https://www.lifemark.co.nz/>

New Zealand Standards for Design for Access and Mobility – Buildings and Associated Facilities NZS4121:2001

These are the minimum standards and are compliant with the NZ Building Code 1991. Free download via Standards New Zealand website.

Phone: (04) 498 5990

Website: www.standards.govt.nz/assets/Publication-files/NZS4121-2001.pdf

Universal Design Hub

Universal design checklists, accessible dimensions, case studies, and practical advice using the universal design tool.

Website: www.aucklanddesignmanual.co.nz/design-subjects/universal_design

WAVE Web Accessibility Evaluation Tool

WAVE is a suite of evaluation tools to help make web content more accessible to individuals with disabilities.

Website: wave.webaim.org/

Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) Overview

Documents explain how to make web content more accessible to people with disabilities.

Website: www.w3.org/WAI/standards-guidelines/wcag/

BRANZ Universal Design Hub

New Zealand based resources for the architecture and design community on universal design.

Provides sketch gallery of dimensioned solutions, photo gallery of universal design in NZ homes, and calculation tool to determine financial implications of incorporating universal design.

Website: www.branz.co.nz/cms_display.php?sn=215&st=1

Basic Definitions of Conditions

Cerebral Palsy

Damage to the brain prior or during birth, or in childhood due to accident or infectious disease. This leads to varying disabilities of physical movement, speech and intellect. Individuals can range from requiring full assistance to being fully independent. There are three types: Spastic (muscles are very tight), Athetoid (involuntary movements), Ataxic (poor balance, unsteady gait, low muscle tone).

Dementia

A pathological reduction in brain function resulting in a range of cognitive deficits including impaired judgment and memory.

Down Syndrome

A congenital disorder caused by a chromosomal defect characterised by slow physical development, cognitive deficits and a number of physical abnormalities. Often accompanied by heart disease and vision defects.

Epilepsy

Many types varying from seizures lasting a very short period of time with the person appearing to be dreaming, to seizures where there is loss of consciousness accompanied by twitching and thrashing movements, followed by extreme tiredness.

Head Injury

Can result in a wide range of physical, mental and emotional symptoms, including walking difficulties, lapses of concentration/memory and inappropriate behaviour.

Hearing Impairment

Separated into two groups – those with little or no useable hearing described as Deaf, and those who have some or much of their hearing described as Hearing Impaired.

Hemiplegia

Full or partial paralysis of one side of the body due to disease, trauma or stroke.

Intellectual Impairment/Disability

Ranging between severe to mild disorders in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in: understanding or using spoken or written language that may affect the person's ability to think, listen, spell or perform mathematical calculations.

Multiple Sclerosis

A disorder of the brain occurring in adulthood, with diverse symptoms such as coordination difficulties, bladder and bowel disturbances, decreased mobility, fatigue and double vision. The disease may go into remission or continue a steady deterioration.

Muscular Dystrophy

A progressive and serious loss of use of muscles. Individuals can vary from being independent to requiring full assistance. Osteoarthritis Wear and tear on joints due to age. Often very painful.

Paraplegia

Paralysis of the lower half of the body, including partial or total loss of function of both legs, often as a result of a spinal injury.

Parkinson's Disease

A chronic disease of the brain principally affecting older people. Characterised by tremors and muscle rigidity, causing slowness of movement, shuffling gait and impaired speech.

Physical Impairment

Any restriction of mobility or function with limbs or organs.

Polio

A virus affecting the spinal cord and brain stem causing paralysis of muscles, rheumatoid arthritis, inflammation and swelling in various joints leading to stiffness and pain.

Stroke (CVA)

A sudden interruption of blood supply to the brain resulting in damage to brain cells. This often leads to hemiplegia and difficulty with speech.

Spina Bifida

Congenital malformation of the spinal cord, usually resulting in paraplegia.

Quadriplegia/Tetraplegia

The paralysis of the body involving partial or total loss of function in both arms and legs.

Visual Impairment

Varying from low vision involving significant useable vision to total blindness.

Courses and Training

Autism NZ

The team can provide individually tailored programmes to address the needs of a variety of groups working with different age groups.

Website: www.autismnz.org.nz

Children's Bible Ministries

One of the training days the New Zealand team offers is on ministering to children with special needs.

Website: cbm.org.nz

Joni and Friends

As part of their ministry they offer a range of online courses, including children's ministry, families, advocacy, and a biblical view of disability.

Website: www.joniandfriends.org

Laidlaw

Laidlaw offer a distance based theological paper titled Theology & Experience of Disability

Website: www.laidlaw.ac.nz

Learn NZSL

Provides free resources and videos to help you learn New Zealand Sign Language

Website: www.learnnzsl.nz

SPELD NZ

Offers training for supporting children with learning disabilities such as dyslexia

Website: www.speld.org.nz

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Acknowledgements

Thanks to all the people at the Auckland Elevate Drop-in Centre who contributed their pearls of wisdom.

A big thank you to Churches for All in England for inspiration and for encouraging accessible churches through the “Churches for all Award” Scheme. Produced by “Through the Roof”; in England.

Thank you to Barrier Free New Zealand Trust for promoting accessibility throughout the community. Special thanks to Di & Hugh Willis, and Evan Clulee for their role in editing, to Karen Jack for compiling and authoring *Everybody Welcome*, and to Kirsty Anderson for the 2019 revisions and additions.



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