

October 2003

Welcome to the first newsletter from the Office for Disability Issues, which will be produced every two months. The Office can be contacted on ph 04 918 9573, fax 04 918 0075 or email odi@msd.govt.nz. An accessible print version of this newsletter is available on www.odi.govt.nz

One Year On For Office

The Office for Disability Issues has now been running for a year, and it is a reflection of our workload that we have already reached our full complement of ten staff, four years earlier than scheduled.

The Office has three key roles: policy; implementing and monitoring the New Zealand Disability Strategy; and supporting the Minister for Disability Issues in her advocacy role.

The policy role is in two parts – leading key policy development across government and providing a disability perspective to policy led

by other government departments. In our first year of operation this policy role has taken much of our resource as we build disability awareness across government.

The implementation and monitoring of the Disability Strategy has involved liaison with all 37 government departments. The Office has encouraged the development of action plans for 2003/4 that will move departments closer to achieving the values, objectives and actions of the Strategy. These plans will be on our website within the next month and we welcome your feedback. The reports on last

year's progress will also be available.

In supporting the Minister, the Office regularly meets with people with disabilities, members of the disability community and the wider disability sector. Many people contact us directly with issues. We appreciate hearing from you and pass on your views when we meet with the Minister once a fortnight, as well as informing other departments.



Director Jan Scown.

Bill Considers Official Status For Sign Language

The Government is considering whether to make New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL) an official language in New Zealand.

NZSL is the preferred language of New Zealand's Deaf community. NZSL is a wholly visual language and is the main accessible language for Deaf people.

The Office for Disability Issues is leading work towards a NZSL bill which proposes to give recognition to Deaf people's linguistic and cultural rights. The Bill will also assist with implementing the New Zealand

Disability Strategy to help remove barriers to participation for Deaf New Zealanders.

In May 2003 the Office consulted key government departments, community agencies and over 250 members of the Deaf community. Consultations with the Deaf community were assisted by a Deaf Advisory Group. Initial feedback was reported to the Minister for Disability Issues Hon Ruth Dyson in June 2003.

The Minister then directed the Office to prepare a Cabinet paper

of proposals for a NZSL Bill and related work.

The Office will present a paper for consideration by Cabinet in October 2003.

After receiving direction from Cabinet further work and timelines will become clearer.



The Office's sign language team ready for action. Left to right: Rosie Henley, Victoria Manning and Joy Liddicoat.

UN Convention To Promote Rights

New Zealand is helping develop an international convention promoting the rights of disabled people.

Speaking to a United Nations (UN) meeting called to discuss proposals for a convention, the New Zealand delegation said it was essential that there is full participation of disabled people and their representatives as the convention is developed.

During the meeting the delegation contributed six formal statements outlining ideas for the proposed convention, based on the NZ Disability Strategy. It also strongly supported a process involving non-government organisations (NGO) that represent disabled people, as well as Governments.

The delegation included Jan Scown and Tessa Thompson from the Office for Disability Issues, Clive Pearson and Andrew Begg from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade and Human Rights Commissioner Robyn Hunt. Two people with disabilities nominated by disability organisations, Gary Williams and Dave Henderson, were funded by the Ministry of Social Development to be part of the delegation. Robert Martin, another disabled New Zealander, represented Inclusion International.

At the meeting in New York in June 2003 the international NGO community awarded New Zealand three badges of honour for its progressive approach to disability issues and for the leadership it brought to the meeting.

New Zealand has put itself forward as a possible



New Zealanders at the United Nations in New York. From left to right: Robert Martin (Inclusion International), Robyn Hunt (Human Rights Commission), Gary Williams (Disabled Persons Assembly), Jan Scown (Office for Disability Issues) Dave Henderson (Disability Organisations' nominee) and Tessa Thompson (Office for Disability Issues).

member of a working group to draft a text for the convention. This group will meet in early 2004. The draft convention will then be considered at the next UN meeting in New York.

Development of the convention forms a major piece of work for the Office for Disability Issues. Director Jan Scown says it will reinforce the human rights of disabled people and make disability issues more visible. It will also help shape human rights norms to meet the particular circumstances of disabled people and make obligations and requirements clearer.

Having An Ordinary Life

Adults with an intellectual disability have difficulty accessing rights of citizenship and have lives that are very different from other New Zealanders says a National Health Committee report released in September 2003.

The report 'To Have An Ordinary Life: community membership for adults with an intellectual disability' says that with some notable exceptions, policies and services for these adults are not moving in the direction of the New Zealand Disability Strategy.

The report identifies three priorities for action:

- refocusing needs assessment, service co-ordination and service purchasing, moving away from the allocation of a limited range of services to focus on service design to meet the individual's changing support and development needs over time;

- moving away from the custodial ownership model of service delivery by separating the cost and assistance with accommodation from the funding and provision of disability support;
- addressing the neglect of basic health needs.

The report makes 23 recommendations and says it is vital to adopt a new way of thinking that focuses on individuals, on their aspirations as citizens and on how these can be better achieved.

The Office for Disability Issues endorses the Committee's recommendations and says the report challenges government departments to rethink their policies and service provision in line with the direction of the New Zealand Disability Strategy. It will be working across government to support change.

The report is available at www.nhc.govt.nz.