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Disability Advisory Council

An independent advisory council is being set up to help the Government respond more effectively to the needs and issues of disabled people.

Office for Disability Issues Director Jan Scown says the Council will be a consultative forum with a strong advisory role. It will keep the Office informed on emerging issues and provide advice and comment on the work of the Office. It will also provide advice and feedback on the implementation of the Disability Strategy.

The Council will be made up of 11 disabled people and two family members of disabled people. It will include representatives with physical, sensory, neurological, psychiatric, intellectual or other impairments.

Disabled people were clear that they wanted disabled people to select who would represent them on the Disability Advisory Council, so members will be appointed by disability consumer organisations rather than the Office. The Office will select which organisations do the appointing. To ensure as many groups of disabled people are a part of the process, the Office will from time to time review and replace appointing organisations.

The initial selection of appointing organisations has been completed by the Office. The first council meeting will be held early next month. Council members' names and details will be published on the Office's website www.odi.govt.nz

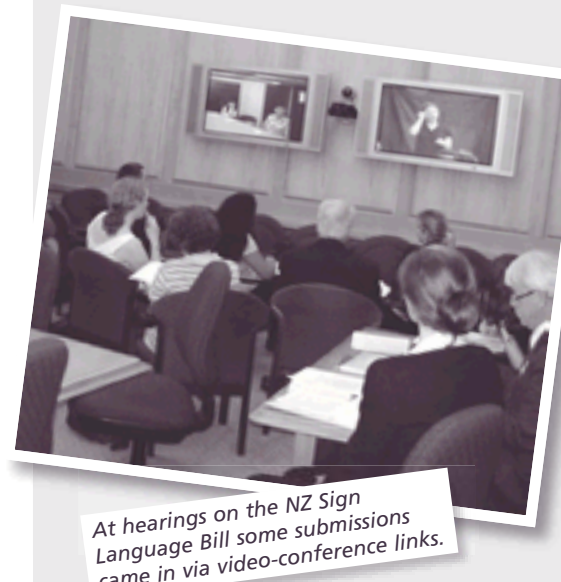
NZ Sign Language Bill

Parliamentarians on the Justice and Electoral Select Committee are learning a lot about New Zealand Sign Language.

The Select Committee convened three hearings for deaf submitters in Wellington and Auckland with video-conference links to Christchurch and Whangarei. They saw members of the Deaf community making submissions in their own language, and saw how effective communication can be using sign language.

The hearings highlighted the ability of sign language users and interpreters to communicate both the spirit and the technical detail of law. They proceeded at a conversational pace demonstrating how effective sign language can be as a real-time language.

The Bill will be reported back to the House on 10 May 2005.



At hearings on the NZ Sign Language Bill some submissions came in via video-conference links.

Disability Perspective Online

The Office has developed an online resource for government officials on how to include a disability perspective when drafting laws and regulations, developing policies or when changing the delivery of services.

A disability perspective means considering the needs and aspirations of disabled people. Applying this perspective requires looking at whether there will be any impact on disabled people and their families. Consulting with the disability community is an important part of this process.

For more information go to www.odi.govt.nz

Consultation On Total Mobility Review

The Ministry of Transport is seeking feedback from disabled people and disability sector organisations on the Total Mobility Scheme.

The scheme subsidises taxi fares and partially funds hoists for total mobility vans.

A 2003 survey highlighted variations in service provision and availability around the country.

Current consultation seeks feedback for possible changes to improve the adequacy, consistency, portability, sustainability and coverage of the scheme. The closing date for submissions is 30 April 2005.

For more information go to www.transport.govt.nz

Gearing Up For General Election

The Chief Electoral Office is implementing a Disability Action Plan for this year's general election.

The plan was developed following the 2002 election, in consultation with disabled people and organisations representing their interests.

According to the Chief Electoral Officer David Henry the plan aims to reduce barriers to voting faced by disabled people.

"We are working on providing more information about the voting process, and highlighting the option available to disabled people to cast an advance vote. An advance vote means people can cast their vote in the weeks before the election. This can be a really positive option for disabled people," he says.

The Chief Electoral Office has also worked with the Barrier Free New Zealand Trust to improve accessibility at polling places. Checklists include checking external and internal access routes, entrances, parking, lighting and furniture before a polling place is classed as being accessible for disabled voters.

"We aim to have at least 50% of polling places and a minimum of 12 in each electorate that are suitable for disabled voters," David says.

More information about the Disability Action Plan is available at www.elections.org.nz



Convention Progress

Work is continuing on a United Nations convention on the rights of disabled people

New Zealand Ambassador Don Mackay co-ordinated the most recent sessions of the United Nations Ad Hoc Committee on the convention. His report, annexed to the 4th and 5th session reports, is available at www.un.org/esa/socdev/enable

Also included on the website is an outline of the text that received broad support, for example that:

- information to disabled people should be provided in a timely manner and without additional costs, in accessible formats and technologies and be conveyed using sign language, Braille and augmentative alternative communication
- disabled people should not be subjected to arbitrary or unlawful interference with their privacy and correspondence
- the right of disabled people to decide freely and responsibly on the number and spacing of their children on an equal basis with other people should be upheld
- disabled people should be able to live independently and as full participants in the community, including the freedom to choose one's place of residence and living arrangements.

The first half of the draft convention has been discussed in depth and while there are still outstanding issues, progress has been made at reaching general agreement. In particular, there is consensus that for too long disabled people's rights have not been adequately understood or protected under existing treaties. This new convention must reflect new ways of thinking about disability.

The next meeting on the convention takes place in New York in August 2005.

Visitors To Office

The Office for Disability Issues recently hosted visitors from Australia.

Executive Officer of the Disability Advisory Council of Victoria, Claire Thorn, was looking at a whole of government approach to disability issues. She included New Zealand on a trip she was also making to Canada. She was able to give the Office useful information about the work of the Victorian Disability Advisory Council.

Director of Disability in the Department of Housing Disability and Services, Australia Capital Territory, Canberra, Lois Ford, also visited the Office. She discussed the work of the department and the funding split for disability services between the state and federal governments.



Office for Disability Issues staff from left to right: Tessa Thompson, Jan Scown, Juliet Elworthy, Carol Ratnam (front holding present), Bob Hillier (back), Victorian Disability Advisory Council Director Claire Thorn, Judy Small and Victoria Manning.