

Building Capacity Of Disabled People

As part of the Office for Disability Issues' work to enhance the capacity of disabled people and their families/whānau, the Office supports various projects around the country. Below are two such projects.

Partners in policymaking

The Office for Disability Issues and the Standards and Monitoring Service (SAMs) recently piloted a Partners in Policymaking course for disabled people and family members keen to be involved in policy development.

The course provided knowledge of disability issues and the competencies needed to become advocates who can effectively influence public officials.

Office Director Jan Scown recently presented certificates to graduates of the course. It is hoped there will be more courses around the country over the coming year. For more information go to www.sams.org.nz



Promoting blind and vision impaired entrepreneurs

In July, 10 blind and vision impaired students met at Ernst & Young offices in Auckland to take their first steps towards a business career in innovation and entrepreneurship.

The students are participating in a project run by Auckland Unitec – 'Blindness, Dare to be Entrepreneurial'. The project's mission is to teach entrepreneurship to the visually impaired, to help them to be taken seriously by employers and to prepare them to pursue their own enterprises.

The project was open to vision impaired people at no cost. The Office for Disability Issues supported the project by paying the costs of producing project material in Braille.

For more information contact:
Project Leader Hein Erasmus by emailing
heinerasmus@xtra.co.nz

Advisory Council Chair Appointed

Mike Gourley has been appointed as the inaugural chairman of the National Advisory Council to the Office for Disability Issues.

Mike says the Council is an important link between the Office and the wider community, representing the views of people who live with a range of impairments or characteristics that are disabling.

"It is our job to ensure effective representation for people living with learning impairment, vision and

hearing loss, physical impairment, neurological impairment, mental illness, Māori and Pacific people with impairments, deaf people, as well as older people and carers.

"Without effective representation across the board, we cannot advise the Office on how well the Disability Strategy is being implemented and on issues affecting our lives."

However, Mike says the Council is still seeking Māori or Pacific representation and any suggestions

would be welcomed.

He says another priority is to do a stocktake of issues that affect disabled people. Council members are compiling their own lists but Mike urges anyone to contact the Office with their thoughts by Ph 04 918 9547; Fax 04 918 0075; Email judy.small002@msd.govt.nz or writing to the Office for Disability Issues, PO Box 12136, Wellington.

See over page for a full list of council members.

New Relay Service

A nationwide telecommunications relay service to meet the telephone communication needs of deaf, hearing impaired and speech impaired people has been established.

It is marketed as New Zealand Relay. Sprint International New Zealand is the provider.

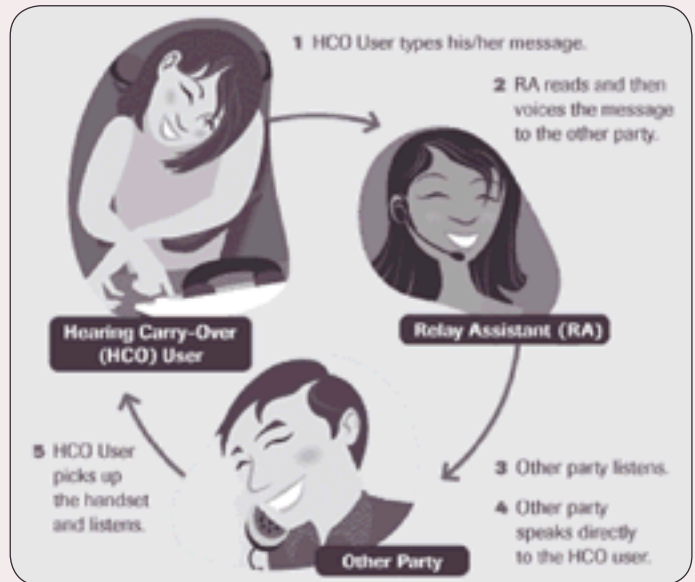
It was launched in November 2004 and by February 2005 call volumes had reached approximately 3,000 per month.

The service works by deaf or hearing impaired users typing their message. This is passed on by a relay assistant who speaks to the hearing user and types back the response. The relay assistant must abide by a strict confidentiality code.

A Relay User's Perspective

“It is great that since the introduction of the NZ Relay Service deaf, hearing and speech impaired people now have the same level of freedom and independence that comes with being able to use a telephone. We can phone family, friends and work colleagues and make business calls, and our family and friends can phone us. For example, I can now phone a plumber when the pipes burst or phone a relative to wish them happy birthday.”

For more information go to www.nzrelay.co.nz



Speech to Speech Trial

A Speech to Speech is to be trialled for nine months, starting this month. Relay assistants are being trained to recognise impaired speech and to speak the caller's message clearly to the recipient. The trial service will be available weekdays 7.30am to 9.00pm. NZ Relay is looking for 20 triallists to provide feedback to help determine a possible permanent service. If you are interested in participating in the trial, contact Chris Blum – TTY: 0800 4 713 713; Voice: 0800 4 715 715; Fax: 0800 4 329 697; Mobile: +64 21 300095; E-mail: Christoph.A.Blum@mail.sprint.com

National Advisory Council Members

- Mike Gourley – Chairperson (physical impairment)
- Claire Freeman (physical impairment – injury related)
- Cheryl Wallace (people living with learning impairment)
- Carolyn Weston (vision loss)
- Dick Earle (hearing loss)
- Tina French (neurological impairment)
- Victoria Roberts (mental illness)
- Ngaire Dogherty (deaf people)
- Graham Stairmand (older people)
- John Forman and Christine Zanders (carers)
- Māori and Pacific people with impairments (vacant position).

Support Funds Extended

All state sector agencies are now able to apply for Ministry of Social Development (MSD) Support Funds.

These funds, previously only available to the private sector, are designed to help disabled employees overcome barriers to employment.

The State Services Commission (SSC) says government agencies should only access the funds once they have already drawn on their own organisational resources to meet their good employer obligations.

Support Funds are administered by Workbridge on behalf of MSD. More information is available at www.workbridge.co.nz

Disabled people employed under SSC's Mainstream programme (which assists disabled people into meaningful, long-term employment within selected state sector organisations) remain not able to apply for Support Funds. Their support needs are addressed through Mainstream. For more information go to www.ssc.govt.nz