

Disability Forum

Thursday 15th October 2009
Clifford Skeggs Gallery

Introduction:

A series of Forums for the Community and Social Service Sector were initiated after social service agencies asked for an opportunity to discuss issues that they and their clients were facing due to the economic recession. The objectives of the sector forums is to look at ways the Community and Social Services could work together to ensure services required by the community are not compromised through the economic down turn. COSS Dunedin wanted to provide the opportunity for specific areas of the sector and community to work together to find solutions to the issues clients, organisations and the community are facing. The forums aim to get action and this is done by addressing three questions. Wouldn't it be great if? What would it take to get there? Who do we need to partner with?

It is important to note that this forum was looking at those living with disability in Dunedin. As all areas of our community there are those that are able to cope through various circumstances and those, for various reasons, that can not. This does not mean the issues discussed below are relevant to all people with disabilities, but they are important issues for a portion of our population.

The outcomes of the Disability Forum are as follows:

There is no extra funding available and funding has decreased. At the same time operational costs are going up and the gap is increasing between services requested and client needs, as well as the ability for organisations to provide for these needs. There is an increase restriction on access to services while the demand on services continues to increase with long waiting lists. Furthermore organisations are facing loss and reduced capacity placing pressure on staff, skills and resources.

Organisations have become focused and narrow on services, rather than providing general wellbeing support. OHS, complexities and miss understanding / use creating barriers to basic rights. The increase in problems and complexity of clients' needs can largely be due to government policies. For example NZ Sign language is the 3rd official language of NZ but it has no right with it such as rights to employment, education and judicial services. This can be considered a lack of rights to judicial services as there is no NZSL interpreter readily available in Dunedin.

There are also implications of economic and social exclusion, with the loss of employment and the need to access other services such as budget advice. The opportunity to find work is not available with under-employment, based not on their working abilities but on their disability. There needs to be an increase in number of jobs available and Self employment opportunities in order for them to make ends meet.

Lastly the disability sector, like many of the other social sectors we have focused on in previous forums, is facing the issue of meeting increasing medical bills and the trade off with personal, food and accommodations costs. Many people are choosing not to go to the dentist

or doctors and are therefore not taking care of their wellbeing as they can not meet the increasing cost.

Would it be great if? – This essay aims to address the key issues facing those with disabilities today.

Funding:

It would be great if funders were not reluctant to provide funds for equipment as well as providing for services. Furthermore it would be great if funding could be based around strength and capacity building allowing for the flexibility in funding where funders react to the services provision and the clients' needs, rather than bureaucratic guidelines. However it is understood that funding can create dependency.

Education:

It would be great if those living with disabilities could have the learning opportunities to be self dependent in life skills and empowerment. It would be great if the Tertiary Sector –TIA Training Incentive Allowance was brought back, it helped to obtain better skills for the workforce. Furthermore it would be great if those living with disabilities were treated the same as everyone else with access to, including interpreters and writers. Also if there was more education on the improvement of working conditions to remove the effects of Neuro Toxins. Lastly it would be great if the incentives were there to encourage and support people want to move away from the benefit system and into the work force.

Income and employment:

It would be great if there were adequate benefits and extra costs to having a disability were recognised and the benefit payments were above the subsistence level. Furthermore if employers were educated about the workplace statistics that show those with disabilities can be are more reliable in some instances more so than able bodied people, therefore more likely to employ those with hearing impairments or are deaf. Lastly that Local and Central government devolve their category B and C outsourcing to Disabled and Disadvantages Associations and Businesses to provide much needed jobs to the disability sector where there is currently a major lack in. This has been successfully done in Australia, where the government has outsourced products and services across a wide range of industries - from design, printing and packaging, to manufacturing, laundry and landscaping to Disability Enterprises.

Housing:

It would be great if there was greater access and affordable housing available to those with disabilities.

Transport:

It would be great if there was fully accessible and perhaps free public transport for those with disabilities and if you could easily get physical access to services in town.

Fire department:

It would be great if there were free visual smoke detectors for the hearing impaired / deaf.

Support Services:

It would be great if those in support services can just support people assisting them to improve their overall situation. Furthermore it would be great if staff training was combined

by community and support organisations to reduce costs, in areas such as Administration, Financial and Marketing.

What would it take to get there? – Addressing what and who needs to change in order to see progress.

In order to address the key issues facing those with disabilities in our community there would need to be greater resources for community development. This would involve Government understanding grass root development, awareness raising and enlarging our circle of influence and increase reciprocity. Validate parking made available to those who need it. Furthermore there would need to be a change of structure from ACC from short term cost cutting to understanding the long term cost of returning to work too early after an accident. There would also need to be greater investment in foundation services, systems and skills with the collaboration of administration, contracting all concerned to reinforce and get commitment. That there was a training calendar for those working in support services to be backed up with support person. Lastly there needs to be a focus on how can we create a community that can sustain themselves in the future. By providing accessible and inclusive communities, freedom to choose where to live and greater public transport with every bus being accessible

Who do we need to partner to make it happen! – acknowledging involvement by multiple parties is necessary to make changes.

In the short term partnership would need to be created between employment agencies to work together with disabled and support agencies. To tap into, Trade Unions/Up Start/ Chamber of Commerce /Tertiary Institutions / Work and Income, Small Business. Partnership with Local government participation and support as well as local agencies participation.

In the long term there would need to be partnership with those who are willing to upskill and who are able and willing to work. There would need to be an increase of availability of jobs, removing barriers to jobs. Long term partnership with the DCC, Service providers, Field workers groups model / networking, Managers, Governance, Administration and E –groups.

Actions:

From these groups three actions to dares issues facing this sector were identified.

1. Awareness Training with public and employer, work is happening at a National level.
2. Networking of fieldworkers, managers, governance levels, the sharing of resources for training and administration. This needs to be seen as an investment in foundation services, systems and skills.
3. The need to influence council to adhere to best practice rather than just building code.