

DISABLED PERSONS' ASSEMBLY

Christchurch & Districts

Christchurch Community House

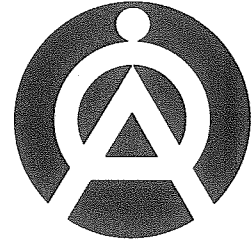
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Submission on Christchurch City Draft “Our Community Plan 2006-2016” on behalf of the Disabled Persons Assembly, Christchurch and Districts

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We do not wish to be heard on this submission.

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Background

‘Disabled Persons Assembly’ is an organisation which aims to provide both equality and maximum opportunity to participate for all disabled people.

People with disabilities have a right to influence and shape policy, enjoy quality and full participation in everyday life. They must be empowered to make informed choices, enjoy dignity and respect, and live as they choose accepting their rights along with their responsibilities.

The organization is a national one (DPA NZ Inc) and in Christchurch and Districts has about 150 individual and corporate members representing user lead groups and service provision agencies. DPA represents the whole disability community (1 in 4 people in Christchurch compared with 1 in 5 nationally).

We are not a service provider but advocate on behalf of people with disabilities.

The NZ Human Rights Act definition of disability uses terminology such as “impairment”, “abnormality” and “remedial means”. A more acceptable working definition moves away from any medical or negative terminology to a ‘social model’. For example, disability is the loss or limitation of opportunity to take part in the mainstream community, on an equal level with others, due to physical and social barriers.

Due to the length of time assumptions around disability have been accepted by New Zealand and society in general, support for disabled people has often been inadequate and inappropriate which in turn has excluded them from mainstream life.

The accepted social model of disability has a more philosophical approach where disabled people accept and manage their impairments, but are no longer prepared to be excluded by policies, practices and laws which are not in their best interests.

Like most people living in this city we possess a deep sense of pride and satisfaction for a number of reasons, one of these being our City Council's past success in vastly improving our community. This is to be commended. However if further improvements are noted as being currently necessary in this city, this current consultation process is extremely valuable. The public of Christchurch realize that final successful outcomes will be achieved with full community participation in the progress of this current long term strategy.

Community Support

The Draft Plan states "Christchurch has a diverse range of people" and this is applicable for our response in this consultation. The Council has an important role through it's legal and moral obligations and responsibilities in responding to this diversity.

Many people with disabilities living in Christchurch experience significant personal and social limitations due to a lack of support in the City Council's policies.

Although currently the City Council provides a number of accessible housing units for people with disabilities it is not enough for either the present demand or that expected from future population increases. DPA recommends that in future housing projects include at least one level entrance, wide halls and doorways and more space in bathrooms. People with disabilities may live in accessible houses but are unable to visit friends and family since most of them live in inaccessible properties. Access for the disability community will be access for all citizens.

There are also inherent problems regarding inappropriate access standards in many public buildings

It is ironic that the Council adopted an "Equity and Access" policy in 2001 which refers directly to this issue while relatively little improvement has been made regarding provision of access for disabled people. Two examples are The Red Cross building in Birmingham Drive and The Nurses Association in Washington Way. Neither of these buildings, erected in the past 2/3 years, have lift access to the first floor.

There unfortunately appear to be inconsistencies in the application of the accessibility provisions of the Building Code (4121) when considering the accessibility of public buildings.

The recent proposal to close some of the suburban libraries is of significant concern for many people with disabilities. Apart from Spreydon, which has lost patronage to the new Sydenham library, the others are maintaining useage with Bishopdale at approximately 175 000 per annum and Redwood at about 77 000. The three areas all contain a high population of people with disabilities who would be adversely affected by the closures.

The future of the mobile library service is also in question.

Recently a number of innovative suggestions have been made regarding re-valuating and possibly updating this service and moving towards a similar service to that normally provided in suburban libraries. Obviously additional services would be likely to increase popularity and increase in patronage.

Suggestions include:

1. Updating to include newer type computer technology, including full Internet Broadband (wireless) This should improve access to available library books, general information etc.
2. The introduction of an onboard TV available for videos supplied by the Library Service. This would encourage awareness and develop interest and social skills for people who can not read and people with intellectual and hearing impairments. Introducing use of play stations would also stimulate interest and can be used as part of developing skills for intellectually impaired people.
3. Supplying equipment for listening to, and checking "talking books" would greatly assist people with visual impairments and people who are unable to physically handle books in print.
4. Approach national and local business organisations to assist with funding as sponsors etc.)

These suggestions could be workable in both urban and rural areas.

DPA have great concerns over the funding for community support and development, regarding the amount of funds available and the fact that this has been static for some years. We appreciate the postponement of the funding review until the Community Development Strategy has been reviewed.

Consultation from people with disabilities on the newly released "Safer Christchurch" document was negligible and we feel strongly that we should be added to the groups and agencies involved in regular consultation. Through this we can assist with advice and support also from individual disabled people who have voiced their concerns.

Although there are still a number of areas needing improvement, DPA highly commends changes which have recently been made which have and will in the future, greatly assist people with disabilities within the Christchurch community. One of these is the provision of powered mobility scooters in locations such as the Central Business District and Botanic Gardens. There is also a marked increase in provision of manual wheelchairs on public premises. This provision is much appreciated and apparently being highly utilised.

Democracy and Governance (including Communication)

There is still a lack of general understanding regarding the adoption of appropriate formats for people with disabilities. These specific formats must not be considered or offered as an “add on” but as a basic human right in a civilized society.

Documentation put out by the Council is often quite daunting and so we would suggest that material be provided in a simpler format. This would make it more accessible to people with limited reading skills, such as intellectually disabled people and those whose first choice of language is not English. This should encourage more participation in consultation from these groups of people.

Providing material in media suitable for blind or visually impaired people would improve accessibility. Audio, large print, Braille, simplified layouts and Word versions (many screen readers function better with Word documents than Adobe pdfs) are options which could be considered.

People with intellectual impairments will understand a document using large print, graphics/illustrations in bold colours and simple technology. This occurs rarely so we suggest consultation with user led organisations to assist. Further methods of communication are quite conventional and include public displays in Malls and shopping centres and the use of Radio and local/regional/national TV channels.

Central and quite critical to the area of governance is the importance of adopting a more stringent approach to regulation of “barrier free” and user friendly auditing of public buildings and facilities. Although this is carried out during construction and/or renovation by fully qualified, and approved CCC inspectors and “Barrier Free” auditors, there are still discrepancies associated with the standards which are being applied.

These discrepancies and disparities can apply to all the access standards adopted by CCC’s “Equity And Access” policy which states:

- 4.1. Design, construct, and maintain footpaths, crossings, paved areas and streets in ways, which facilitate their safe and practical use.
- 4.2. Address specific road safety issues raised by people with disabilities. These include problems with specific pedestrian crossings and intersections and uneven footpath surfaces.

- 4.3. Design, provide and monitor the use of mobility parking which is physically accessible, affordable, safe to use and appropriately located.
- 4.4. Ensure parking provisions for people with physical disabilities are retained or enhanced when 'green' anti-car measures are implemented in central cities by giving these parking provisions proper legislative standing.
- 4.5. Enforce regulations relating to footpaths and streets to allow people with disabilities to move about unobstructed (this includes, for example, cars parked across entrance ways and sandwich boards on footpaths).
- 4.6. Ensure all Council services, facilities, amenities and places of recreation (for example parks and beaches, galleries, libraries and cultural venues) maximise the opportunities for people with disabilities to attend and participate.
- 4.7. Employ general design principles appropriate for people with disabilities in any re-development or new building undertaken.
- 4.8. Enforce statutory requirements for buildings and amenities to ensure their compliance with Building Act, Building Code and Design for Access and Mobility--Buildings and Associated Facilities Code NZS 4121:200.1
- 4.9. Consult people with disabilities in the early planning and design stages of new developments and redevelopment.

Recreation and Parks

Many of Christchurch's indoor and outdoor facilities are both attractive and popular. They are very important in making this an enjoyable city.

It is disappointing that a number of access issues are still apparent for people with disabilities. There is still a lack of ramps in many of these facilities and often footpaths are not suitably designed for people with restricted mobility. Often signage is poor and some toilet facilities urgently require upgrading in many popular recreational locations.

The suggested closure of some local public swimming pools (Woolston, Edgware, Belfast and Sockburn) is also of great concern as very little is apparently being currently considered about suitable or adequate replacements. Papanui swimming pool was closed in this past year and an ideal purpose built recreational centre is urgently required. This area is reputed to be where the largest increase of residential population is currently occurring within Christchurch.

Transport and City Street's

The Council needs to carefully review suggestions listed or outlined in the current (ECan) Christchurch Public Passenger Transport Review Consultation process. There are a number of important submitted items in this review dealing with the current difficulties faced by many disabled people when using public transport.

The Regional Passenger Transport Plan has been very successful in enabling Christchurch to keep ahead with targeted plans in public transport use and some other key issues. We were particularly pleased to see that bus use in Christchurch in March this year was a 30 year high at 1.51 million trips.

A large number of disabled people use public transport and taxis but there are still problems with physical accessibility for disabled people using wheelchairs and scooters, elderly people and those with young children (particularly in pushchairs). These problems are likely to be more prevalent in future as Canterbury's demographics change. Most notably Future Path Canterbury projects that the number of people over-65 will more than double in the period 2001-2021 (from approx. 48 000 to 110 000) with a consequent increase in those with mobility constraints (due to conditions such as arthritis or deteriorating vision) and hence difficulties with access.

Considerable progress has been made with the buses themselves (both in numbers and in quality) and the original targets have been exceeded which is great to see. Increased standardization in bus layouts would be helpful, especially for people who are blind or have low vision (contrasting colour schemes can be important for those with low vision), and more room for powered wheelchairs. It is also important that arrangements for securing wheelchairs are adequate to ensure passenger safety.

For bus and taxi drivers, standardization of mandatory training in disability awareness, along with competence and safety issues, should be introduced in the first six weeks of being employed as a driver. Ideally this would be an integral part of gaining a "P" endorsement in acquiring a licence to drive a bus or taxi.

Currently there is little support and understanding for the large number of people with an intellectual or hearing impairment, who use public transport. As this issue is one of communication, adequate training is essential.

This training should be put out to tender and delivered by disabled people who are experienced in both training and presentation, and should include a wide representation of disabled people with physical, sensory, intellectual and psychiatric impairments, in the training programme.

Substantial infra-structure deficiencies still remain that particularly affect disabled people and these are primarily the remit of the City Council. Many of Christchurch's roads become an insurmountable barrier as they are not 'crossing-pedestrian-friendly' particularly for anyone with impaired mobility or vision (note that adults with young children could fall into this group). This can make a bus stop a mere 20 metres away inaccessible to, say, elderly people from a home simply because the road is an impassable barrier. Careful siting of stops and associated crossings, cut kerbs etc. is essential, together with prioritization on the basis of need (this may require gathering further information) to ensure the most cost effective expenditure. Standardised shelters and stops would also be beneficial (and may bring economies of scale as distinct from the costs of 'one-offs'), again ensuring that they are accessible to people in motorized wheelchairs. Information needs to be provided in forms accessible to people with sensory impairments and intellectual disabilities.

We suggest that the most effective way of dealing with the problems identified above would be for the Council (and its partners) to implement the recommendations of the Human Rights Commission's report "The Accessible Journey" (see Chapter 10 of the Report) as soon as possible. This would ensure that public transport would not only be accessible to disabled people but would also improve accessibility for elderly people and those travelling with young children.

We support providing priority lanes for buses.

We would like the Council to examine the feasibility of park-and-ride schemes from the City edge and from other townships such as Kaiapoi and Rolleston. The strategies adopted in the Selwyn and Waimakariri DC LTCCPs may adversely affect the usefulness of park-and-ride schemes (and bus use generally) as the current prevalence of piecemeal development in rural areas, rather than concentrating development around existing centres, tends to encourage car not bus use. Strategies of concentrating development in key settlements would be more effective in discouraging car use and encouraging alternatives. Focusing development around making best use of existing communities and assets by properly planned mixed-use development, i.e. following the principles of what is sometimes referred to as 'Smart Growth', would have a number of advantages.

Many people with disabilities have breathing related conditions and find the air pollution while moving around Christchurch another barrier to their activities. Sustainability and self-sufficiency require a shift away from fossil fuels. Hence, we would ask that the Council investigate alternatives for the vehicle fleet. These could include expanding electric shuttle services, hybrid buses (which are up to 60% more fuel efficient), bio-diesel, liquefied petroleum gas and ethanol. These all have both advantages and disadvantages but assessing the overall benefits and disbenefits would be useful in establishing future policy directions.

We also propose that the Council look at the practicability of providing rail or light-rail travel facilities.

A careful review is also urgently required for improving current regulatory standards regarding the placement of sandwich boards, street mounted signs and furniture outside restaurants and similar retail outlets and enforcing those standards.

Rubbish collection can also cause problems as bins etc. on paths can be hazardous and often make footpaths completely inaccessible especially for visually impaired people and those with limited mobility. DPA asks that CCC approach their refuse contractors to ensure more consideration particularly in returning emptied bins to the curbside.

Two leading national disability organisations (Disabled Persons Assembly NZ Inc, NZ Crippled Children's Society) produced an excellent publication in September 2004 entitled "Inclusive Communities". This has been developed as a set of guidelines for city and town councils, District Health Boards and other agencies. The document contains comprehensive information on issues around the many difficulties and concerns identified by people with disabilities. This document was presented to CCC in November 2004 and was accepted as further support to CCC's "Equity and Access" policy. We recommend that the information and conclusions from "Inclusive Communities" are incorporated in updating the "Equity and Access" policy.

Finally the appointment of the Metropolitan Advisor for Older Adults/Disability has led to some substantial changes and great improvements by CCC for people with disabilities. This has created a strong link between the disability sector and CCC, and has proved very effective in enabling progress and action on many issues.

The formation of the CCC Disability Reference Group and an informal Disability Access Forum have also been a result of co-operation between the Advisor and the disability sector.

We believe that it is essential that CCC develop a focussed and comprehensive disability strategy as part of the LTCCP, as have Manakau and Wellington.