



DIScover

Serving customers with disabilities

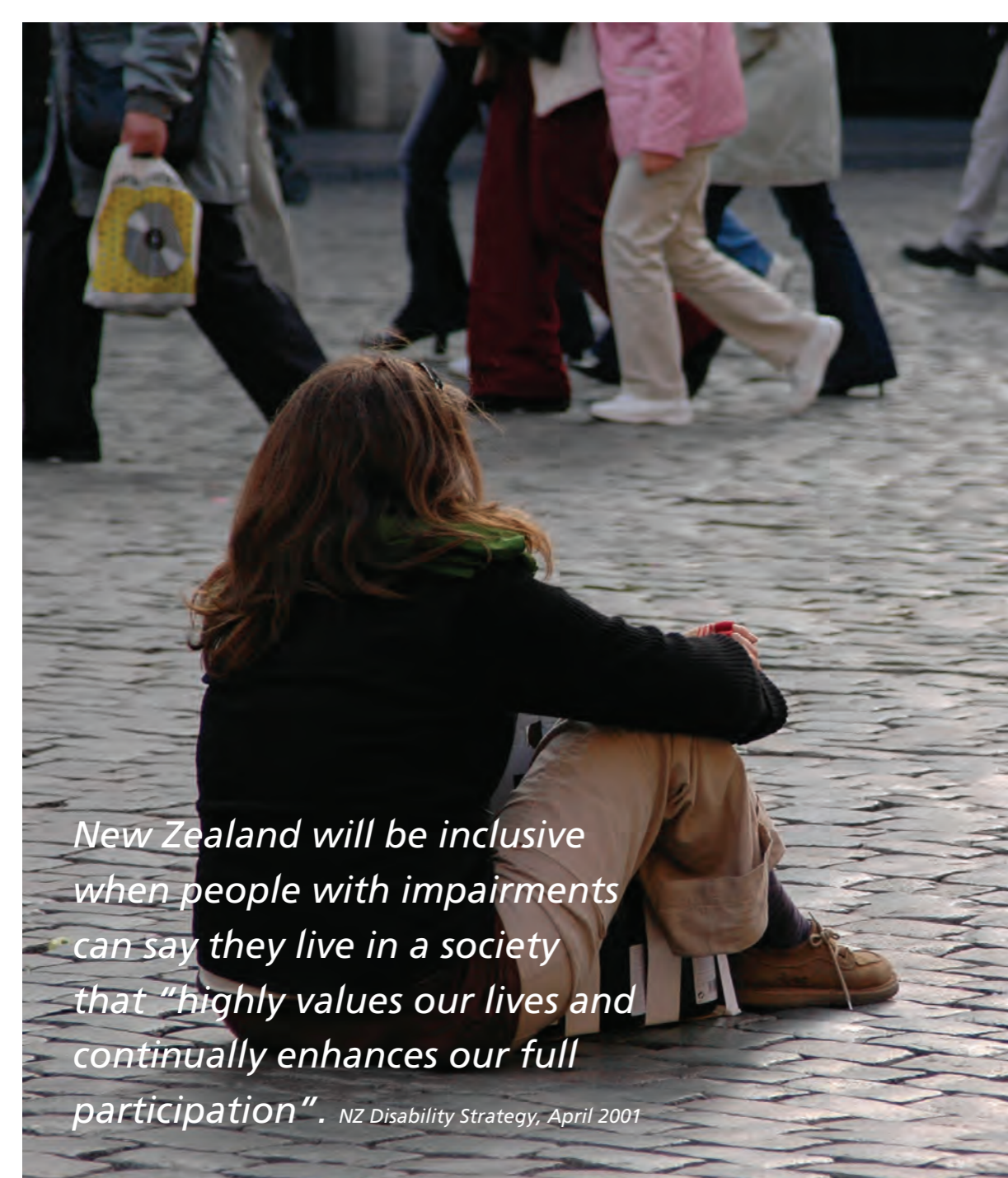




The hope is that the more educated we are about disability, the better services we will be able to provide. This will allow disabled people to participate more fully in their communities and make our organisations more inclusive.

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New Zealand will be inclusive when people with impairments can say they live in a society that "highly values our lives and continually enhances our full participation". NZ Disability Strategy, April 2001



THE GOOD
 "It's great to have people lead and not steer a blind person."

Welcome to the DIScover guide

The purpose of this guide is to assist customer service staff to discover ways in which to better engage and serve people in their community who have a disability or impairment.

No matter what industry you work in, be it a community facility, a retail outlet, a community organisation or a service provider - DIScover can help you become more inclusive.

The hope is that the more educated we are about disability, the better services we will be able to provide. This will allow disabled people to participate more fully in their communities and make our organisations more inclusive.

This guide has been put together by people who have a range of impairments and has been funded by the Ministry of Social Development's Making a Difference Fund. We wish to thank all those who contributed to this booklet, especially those in our community who have a disability and openly shared their stories, experiences and ideas.

A final thank you to Stewart Sexton (www.abilitydis.biz) whose valuable input was most appreciated, and Pam MacNeill (<https://sites.google.com/site/pammacneillconsulting/>) for her training expertise and guidance.

For more information about DIScover please contact:

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To view the training document that supports this resource visit:

www.upperhuttcity.com/discover

How do we define disability?

“Having both a visual impairment and physical disability can sometimes be difficult as they often impact on each other but I don’t let my disabilities rule my life.”

We live in a disabling society¹. 20% of our population are living with a disability of some sort – that’s approximately 1 in 6 New Zealanders.

When we think about people with disabilities we often think of the obvious ones. For example someone in a wheelchair or a blind person with a white cane. But impairments can affect anyone and most people experience what is termed a temporary impairment or disability at least once in their lifetime. Can you think of a time you have injured yourself and not been able to do tasks you normally can? Take a broken arm or leg for instance, how did this affect your day to day life?

¹ The New Zealand Disability Strategy. ODI, 2001, p.3
Office of Disability Issues <http://www.odi.govt.nz/resources/guides-and-toolkits/disability-perspective/resources/plain-language.html>

Did you know:

In 2001, the Government introduced the New Zealand Disability Strategy which aims to make New Zealand a more inclusive society. The Strategy was based on the social model of disability which distinguishes between impairments and disability.

Impairment = an injury or condition that may be physical, sensory, neurological, psychiatric or intellectual that causes a loss of physiological or psychological function

Disability = limitation of opportunities to take part in society on an equal level with others due to social and environmental barriers.

There are five main categories for impairments and within these categories there can be a huge range in ability and severity. They are:

Physical – this refers to a person who has an impairment that affects their mobility or agility (wheelchair, crutches, scooter, walking stick).

Sensory – this generally refers to people who are blind, deaf, visually or hearing impaired.

Neurological – impairments associated with the brain (Alzheimer’s disease, epilepsy etc). Neurological impairments can affect a person’s coordination, speech and general communication.

Psychiatric/Psychological – long term emotional, behavioural or mental health conditions that can affect day to day interactions.

Intellectual – also referred to as a learning disability.

“The only disability in life is a bad attitude.”

SCOTT HAMILTON²

Impairments come in many different forms – some are visible while some are invisible.

Visible impairments tend to be the physical ones which can be seen by others.

Invisible impairments are neurological, psychiatric and intellectual which are sometimes harder to detect just from looking at a person.

Here is an example of each, can you think of more?

Visible impairment - A visually impaired person with a guide dog

Invisible impairment - Bi-polar disorder

² Disabled World: <http://www.disabled-world.com/disability/disability-quotes.php#ixzz1cy66VsQa>



THE UGLY

“I’m always pleased that my disability is an invisible one (mental health consumer)”.

What difference can I make?

“Community is important. As Christchurch has found out, we all need each other. Community facilities enable people to have a space where we can come together for learning, celebration, exercise, group meetings, worship and so on. All of these need to be inclusive, barrier-free places.”

Community facilities are important to everyone for many different reasons. They offer a service, support people’s needs and connect members of the community. Making facilities accessible is an important part of this process. It enables people with disabilities to access the services more easily and participate fully in their community.

Attitudes of staff working or volunteering at a community facility, or for any other community service, are as important as physical accessibility.

“The goal is to create a positive experience for any person visiting your facility or organisation so they want to keep coming back. This is best done by eliminating barriers and providing good customer service.”

To understand and explain disability in society, the **medical** and **social** model has been created:

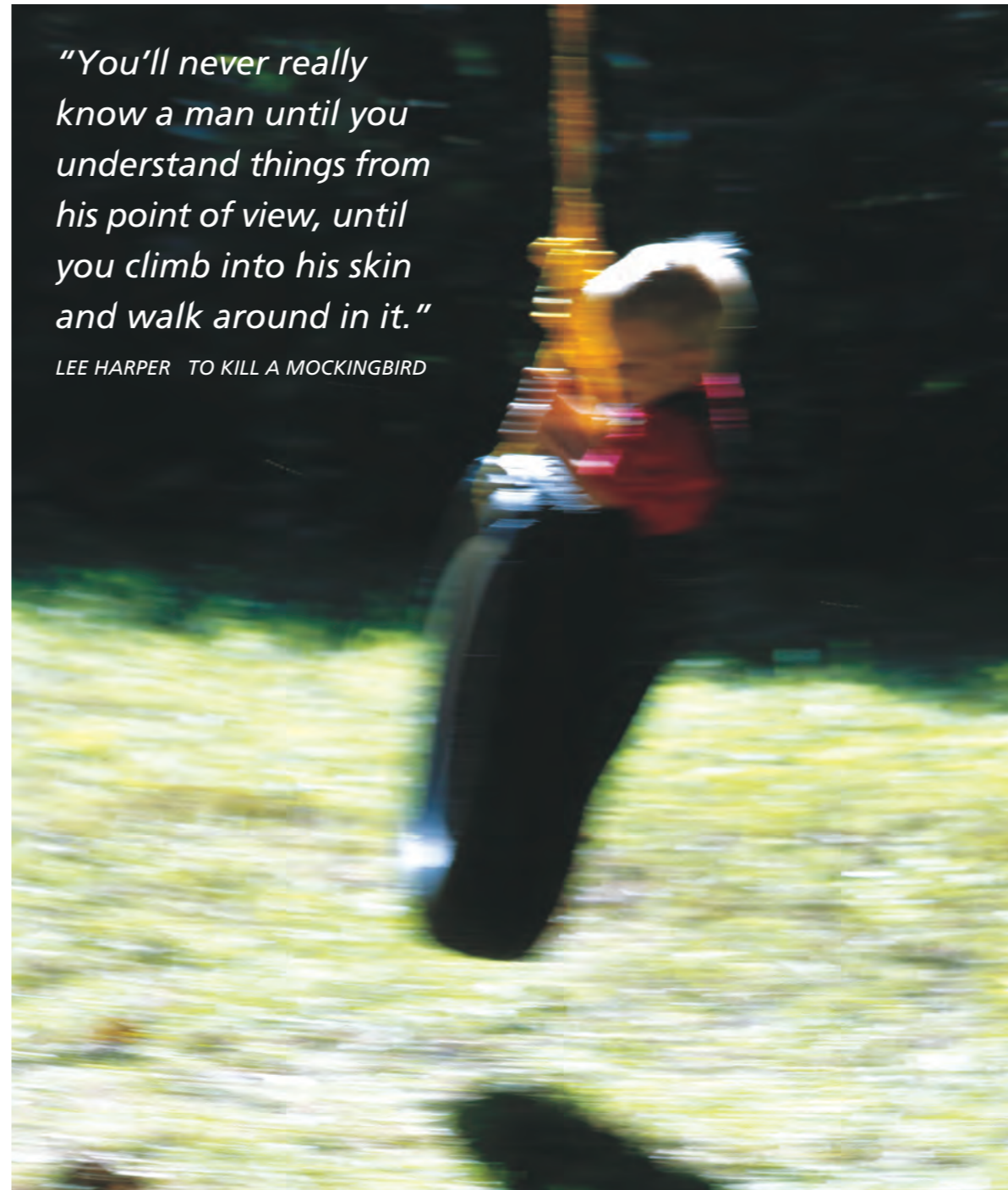
Historically, the **medical** model was used for developing health and support services for people with impairments. The **medical** model views disability as a problem of the person; it requires medical care or treatment to ‘fix’ them and make the person more acceptable in today’s society.

The current and preferred **social** model sees the issue as a socially created problem. Disability is not an attribute of an individual, but a complex collection of conditions created by society. Rather than ‘fixing’ someone, we look at what we as a society can do to make our communities more inclusive.

What could be done in your place of work to make life easier for a person with a disability?

“You’ll never really know a man until you understand things from his point of view, until you climb into his skin and walk around in it.”

LEE HARPER TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD



THE UGLY

“I was once yelled at in a café at a community facility after my son, who has an intellectual disability, grabbed lollies off the counter. It was such an awful experience and I have refused to go back there. It’s people’s attitudes that need to change. Try to be a bit more understanding.”

What are barriers?

“Disability is the process which happens when one group of people create barriers by designing a world only for their way of living.”

You may not be in a situation to ‘solve’ the array of barriers people with disabilities face, but you can start by being more aware. Addressing prejudice and discrimination, which are often cited by people who have a disability as being the biggest barrier to overcome, is a great place to start. The ability to be inclusive comes down to your attitude and your willingness to assist and do the best you can on a daily basis.

“The more communities that become accessible and the barriers broken down; the more people with disabilities will be seen participating.”

Our communities are becoming more and more accessible for all but there is always room for improvements.

Next time you enter your place of work or recreation, think about what you are experiencing.

- How easily can a person enter the building?
- Once inside, can a person move around with ease?
- How high or low are the desks or service points?
- Where are the toilets and are they accessible to everyone? Is the hand basin and mirror at a height that’s accessible for people using a wheelchair or mobility scooter?
- Is there good lighting and clearly marked light switches and other controls?
- How would you find assistance?
- Does the customer service person look approachable and welcoming?

Thinking about what it is like to have a disability and the barriers that people encounter helps you to think of how better to accommodate all members of your community.

“For me personally having a disability means going slower, having to rely on public transport, being tired a lot, needing to plan ahead all the time to make journeys that are not so arduous that I collapse before I get home. It means often apologising for inconveniencing others when I bang into them or don’t see them. It means often asking for help to find things or places. I rely on people a lot, and it is nice when they are helpful and not scornful or irritated.”

Disability is a matter of perception



THE UGLY

“It’s all well and good to say you are inclusive, but the helpfulness of the staff must reflect this. Bus drivers who don’t wait for me to sit down show little respect for my needs.”

Let's do this!

"We are human beings with a disability (something that may involve some kind of help), but we would like to be treated the same as everybody else."

Each person's experience of impairment is unique. Just because you see two people in wheelchairs or with seemingly similar impairments doesn't mean they experience things the same way. It all depends on the level and severity of their impairment and how it affects them.

How do we provide the best possible customer service when there are so many types of impairments to be aware of? **Simple – you do the best you can!** Here is a practical list of where to start.

What you can do right now

- **Be yourself! Don't allow your fear of saying or doing the wrong thing prevent you from getting to know someone that has a disability.**
- Never make assumptions about what help someone might need – ask people what is the best way you can help them.
- Smile and address the person and use a tone of voice consistent with their age – i.e. speak to an adult as another adult.
- Be considerate of the extra time it may take a person with a disability to get things done.
- Wear a clear large print name badge.

- Be prepared to write things down or fill in forms for disabled customers.
- Teach yourself some basic sign language – how to say 'hello', 'welcome' and 'thank you'.

What you can do in the coming weeks

- Know where the closest accessible car parks are located to your facility or business.
- Ensure public areas are free of clutter.
- Lower shelving.
- Ask a visually impaired person how you can assist them.
- Make signage readable – large print in bold colours.

"Action is eloquence"

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

- Organise some staff training with a disability awareness or accessibility consultant.
- Ensure your reception or welcome desk is at an accessible height and that there are chairs available.
- Put stickers on glass doors and windows to alert people they are there.
- Have a public phone available and encourage staff to access New Zealand Relay – a telecommunication service for the Deaf, Hearing Impaired and Speech Impaired communities of New Zealand.

What changes can you plan in the future

- Remove steps and replace with ramps.
- Look at layout - think about aisle space.
- Provide an accessible toilet/ changing room.
- Promote and run accessible events and programmes.
- Allow guide dogs into your facility or onto your premises.
- Lifts have audible information and any buttons have a tactile surface and Braille markings.

THE GOOD

"It's great to have help with holding doors open if necessary, for those with a mobility aid."

Being a good communicator

"I have limited speech and need people to be patient when we are interacting. It's great if the person doesn't rush me, gives clear instructions and smiles."

Being a good communicator is an important part of providing excellent customer service to all members of your community.

- Be prepared to **listen**.
- Always **introduce yourself**.
- **Speak directly** to the person concerned.
- **Facial expression** and **body language** are important. Be aware of your own and the person's that you are interacting with.
- If the person wants to **write their needs**, then ensure they have access to a pen and paper.
- Make sure words stand out on a page – dark print with a light background is ideal

- Ensure websites and printable materials are in easy-read format. This includes:
 - Knowing your reader - What is important to them?
 - Plan your document. Have a beginning, middle and an end.
 - Keep sentences short, clear and concise.
 - Don't use jargon, or technical words and details.
 - Be consistent in your use of words.
 - Be consistent in presentation and layout.
 - Use a clear typeface, large font – at least 16 point or bigger.
 - Don't use block letters.

- Use pictures and symbols to help people to understand.
- Don't worry about getting it right for everyone – give it a go².

If you can't understand what a person has said, show respect for the person and acknowledge the importance of their message by apologising for failing to understand them.

Never pretend to understand when you do not – this is extremely disrespectful to the person concerned, and devalues their communication.

² Office of Disability Issues <http://www.odi.govt.nz/resources/guides-and-toolkits/disability-perspective/resources/plain-language.html>



Having an impairment should not mean being disqualified from having access to every aspect of life

THE GOOD

"Using the facilities at H²O Xtream (Upper Hutt Swimming Complex) has been a very positive experience. They have excellent facilities for people with disabilities including a pool hoist and one very good accessible changing room which is kept locked so others can't use it. The key has to be collected from and returned to Reception. Staff are always very helpful and nothing is too much trouble."

Behaviour and language

“The biggest barrier to the full participation of disabled people is the negative or stereotypical attitudes of others.”

Challenging behaviour comes hand in hand with customer service.

Customers, whether they have a disability or not, can behave in a challenging or different way. This could be due to medication, mood swings or maybe they are just having a bad day.

Behaviours could include:

- Impatience
- Raised voices
- Loss of coordination
- Loss of concentration
- Sweating

We all experience some of these symptoms from time to time and it helps if we reflect on how we like to be treated.

It is important to remain calm and ask the person how you can assist them.

- Listen to their needs
- Perhaps they would like:
 - to sit down
 - move to a more private area
 - a glass of water
 - for you to phone someone.

Think of a time you have dealt with a difficult or challenging customer. How did you deal with the situation? Did it end in a positive way? What would you do differently next time?

Using the correct language around disability is a positive step towards being inclusive and can alleviate negative tension in a difficult situation.

While there are no hard and fast rules, some words have negative connotations. It is inappropriate to refer to a disabled person as abnormal, a cripple, dumb, handicapped, victim or a sufferer. The correct terms are people with impairments or disabled people. You could also say ‘John is hearing impaired’ or ‘Rachel uses a wheelchair’. This type of language focuses on the person first and their disability afterward.



“Communication leads to community, that is to understanding, intimacy and mutual valuing.” ROLLO MAY

THE UGLY

“On one occasion a bus driver tried to refuse my guide dog and said to me that “people like you should travel with a companion.”

Where do I go for more?

- **The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities**

<http://www.un.org/disabilities/convention/conventionfull.shtml>

- **The New Zealand Disability Strategy**

<http://www.odi.govt.nz/nzds>

- **The Human Rights Commission**

<http://www.hrc.co.nz>

- **Lifetime Design**

<http://www.lifetimedesign.org.nz>

- **Barrier Free New Zealand**

<http://www.barrierfreenz.org.nz>

- **Disability Information and Equipment Centre**

<http://www.diec.co.nz>

- **Be Accessible**

<http://www.beaccessible.org.nz>

- **The National Disabled Persons Assembly**

<http://www.dpa.org.nz/index.html>

Contact your City Council for more information on local disability service providers and organisations.

Visit www.upperhuttcity.com/discover to download the accompanying training document



If we get it right for disabled people, we get it right for all people"

MINNIE BARAGWANATH



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