



**Your help line
(03) 9916 5821**



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ACE DisAbility Network Update Coordinating Committee-ACE providers wanted

We are delighted to welcome Debra Pinkerton of Eastwork Employment onto the Network Coordinating Committee. Debra is already making a strong contribution to the Committee and we hope she finds her work with us worthwhile. In the meantime, we would still like to hear from any other ACE providers who would like to join. Meetings are held six weekly in the Melbourne CBD. If you are interested please contact Olympia or Judy and they will send out the Terms of Reference to you.

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Communities of Practice

Last month the final session of the very successful Community of Practice was completed. Twelve people from all over the state met to tease out a variety of issues around Inclusion and ACE. Some of the topics covered were Disability Action Plans, Partnerships & Best Practice. A follow-up session is being planned for the end of July to see how people have progressed since. We are also looking into setting up a **Wiki** for this group.

Website Revamp

Our new improved website is in the final stages of being developed. We believe it is a comprehensive information source, packed with resources and facts on Disability Inclusion and ACE. Watch this space for news of the impending launch.

This issue – Disability Action Plans

With the anticipated Department of Planning and Community Development review of Disability Action Plans, we thought it timely that we allocate space in this issue to DAP's. We will be looking at the rationale behind these plans, answering some frequently asked questions, providing a "How to" guide and a suggested format for publishing the final plan.

Disability Action Plans

A Disability Action Plan is a tool: a means of raising awareness and creating cultural change while ensuring that your organisation is addressing barriers to the inclusion of people with a disability.

Like a lot of planning measures, it is often the actual process of developing the plan which brings about the awareness that there are barriers. For instance, until you ask the question: "What happens to people with a disability in case of a fire?" you may not realise the adequacy or inadequacy of your emergency procedures. Frequently it is not just people with a disability who benefit from this kind of planning exercise.

Although the presence of a Disability Action Plan in itself cannot act as a protection against discrimination complaints, a) with a plan being actioned there should be fewer complaints and b) the existence of a current plan being lodged with the Australian Human Rights Commission may act as a mitigating factor in your defence should a discrimination action be brought against you.

Having a well thought out Disability Action Plan may also encourage external stakeholders such as local Councils to consider meeting access requirements on an organisation's behalf.

Frequently Asked Questions about Disability Action Plans



1. Do we *have* to have one?

Not unless it is a funding body requirement. There is no legal requirement for ACE providers to have a plan although it is strongly recommended and government bodies are now expected to have one under the Disability Act 2006. However, it is to your benefit (as well as for people with a disability) if you have one, since it assists with making you genuinely more inclusive and as previously stated it can assist if a discrimination complaint is brought against you.

There is no legal requirement for you to have a Strategic Plan either, but few organisations could manage without one.

2. Does it take up much time?

It will take a certain amount of time, but not nearly as much as if you keep having to deal with ad hoc issues and/or complaints. Get help where you can (such the ACE DisAbility Network) and share the tasks. This is an organisation wide exercise, not something to be left to the staff to carry on their own.

3. Can't I just copy someone else's plan?

There would be no point. The worth of a Disability Action Plan is that a) it is unique to your particular circumstances and b) in the value gained by the process of developing and actioning the plan and in the relationships developed on the way.

4. Who needs to be involved?

At the very least the Committee of Management, the staff and people with and without a disability who attend the centre need to play a part. Some people find it advantageous to involve external stakeholders such as their local Council or local disability service organisations. Some providers have involved people with a disability who do **not** attend their centre – asking why they don't attend can be very revealing.

Note: The ACE DisAbility Network is here to help with your plan at any stage

How to go about creating a Disability Action Plan

Step 1. Identifying the barriers

Conduct a physical audit

There are people you can ask to help with this: The ACE DisAbility Network, your local Council, organisations like Equal Access (<http://www.equalaccess.com.au>).

Things to consider are:

- Getting in and out of the building: pathways, passage ways, doors (width and weight), door handles, steps, floor coverings
- Emergency procedures – think about people who cannot hear a whistle, or see a flashing light
- Signage: external and internal
- Toilets (access, furniture, space, mirrors and taps)
- Lighting
- Technical resources (computer equipment, telephones)
- Parking.

Identify other barriers

Things to consider:

Attitudes, Teaching practices, Community involvement, Assessment & Enrolment forms
Access to information (the brochure, policies and procedures)

This can be done through interviews, but also through surveys to participants (with and without a disability), staff and external stakeholders. Be aware that not everyone can read easily and offer help to people who need help completing forms.

Policy Audit

Do your policies reflect the Education Standards?

Do your policies reflect what actually happens on the ground (and vice versa)?

Step 2. Finding ways to overcome the barriers

Identify strategies, who will be responsible and the time lines and resources needed. Not every solution is immediately resolvable so make timelines realistic.

Identify how you will know that the barrier has been overcome (Key Performance Indicator). Please note, the performance indicators should reflect that a barrier has been overcome NOT that a strategy has been completed – not all first strategies are the right ones.

Step 3. Review draft plan

Once a draft has been drawn up it should be open for comment by all stakeholders who contributed to it.

Step 4. Lodge plan

Once the plan has been signed off by the Committee of Management, it should be lodged with the Australian Human Rights Commission in electronic form to disabdis@humanrights.gov.au ,

Step 5. Action and evaluate plan

As with any plan, your DAP will need to be regularly reviewed to ensure a) that action had been taken according to timelines set and b) that strategies are working.

Many strategies can be evaluated through normal operating procedures such as student satisfaction surveys and staff reviews.

Model documentation format for Disability Action Planning

TOPIC: (e.g. Physical access, information, policy development)

AIM: What you would like to achieve under this topic (e.g. Information for all participants enabling them to make informed choices)

EVALUATION PROCESS: How you will be able to check that strategies are working (e.g. student satisfaction surveys, increased enrolments from people with a disability, statistics)

Barrier	Strategies	Responsibility	Timeline	Resources needed	Performance indicator
List barriers to achieving the AIM stated above	List strategies to overcoming barriers	List those responsible for implementing the strategies or for ensuring that others implement strategies	A reasonable time by which the barrier might be overcome	Resources: funds, personnel, training etc needed to achieve the strategies	How you will know that the barriers have been overcome
Example:					
Service users of some external disability agencies unaware of classes available	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Update email advertising list - Increase hard copy mail out to include these agencies - Easy English versions of brochure distributed - Large print versions of brochure made available 	Centre Manager	July 2010	Increased advertising budget	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increased attendance by service users of these agencies - Positive feedback from service users

Ratified by Committee of Management:

Signature:

Date:

To be reviewed (date):