A whole new attitude

**Submission from DPA Dunedin and Districts**

**on the Dunedin City Council’s Big Decisions, Big Conversations Document**

**Introduction**

DPA is a pan-disability advocacy organisation representing people with physical, sensory (i.e. Deaf, Blind) and learning impairments and people with experience of mental illness/distress and their families/whänau.

We have approximately 1,000 members nationwide and 20 individual and 10 corporate members locally. However, with our reach into the service provider/corporate membership, we represent up to (approximately) 2,000 people with disabilities (on an indirect basis) locally.

In the Otago area, it is estimated on the basis that with 20% of the population reporting some form of disability in the 2013 Disability Survey conducted by Statistics New Zealand. According to the Survey, the Otago disability community could be comprised of up to 52,000 people with physical, sensory, and learning impairments and experience of mental illness/distress at any given time.[[1]](#footnote-1)

## Definition

We define disability for the purposes of this submission as that contained in the New Zealand Disability Strategy which states in its introduction “*disability is a process which happens when one group of people create barriers by designing a world only for their way of living, taking no account of the impairments other people have*.”[[2]](#footnote-2)

# For convenience, in this submission the use of “disabled community or disabled people” includes the Deaf and Blind communities as well as all others who define themselves as disabled.

Within this submission, DPA will be making reference to relevant articles of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCPRD). New Zealand is a signatory to this Convention. This means that both central and local government are duty bound to implement all its clauses. The Convention centrally informs DPA New Zealand’s work at all levels. We would also like to see the Dunedin City Council make this a living document at the local level. This submission will mainly focus on the methods of engagement.

**Main submission**

DPA Dunedin is very pleased to make this submission. The Government’s passing of the Local Government Amendment Act has afforded us this opportunity to comment on the Dunedin City Council’s engagement with the disability community.

Since our submission on the Draft Annual Plan in early 2014, the Council has made some progress towards establishing a policy to enable disabled people (particularly people with sensory impairments, i.e. Deaf, hearing impaired, Blind, vision impaired) to have fuller access to Council communications, information and services. We have been encouraged, after having spoken to Mayor Cull, Chief Executive Sue Bidrose and Councillors Hawkins and MacTavish, both recently and during the year, that the Council has been preparing to act on our submission alongside that of others in making these changes. In particular, our Kaituitui Chris Ford was pleased to have a conversation with Dr Bidrose at the ‘Big Decisions, Big Conversations’ meeting in which she stated that a report was about to go to relevant Council sub-committees and the full Council around improving access to its services, events and information for sensory impaired people. This will hopefully include proposals around provision of New Zealand Sign Language interpreters at meetings and events and information in accessible formats (e.g. Braille) for blind and vision impaired people. We look forward to the holding of discussions around these proposals and would encourage Council to also engage with our fellow Disabled Persons Organisations (DPOs) the Association of Blind Citizens and Deaf Otago as well as with other relevant disability agencies around this.

We would seek to add that the needs of learning disabled people be taken into consideration when conducting consultations and other Council activities as well. People with learning disabilities rely on information provided in what is known as an ‘Easy Read’ format which relies on the use of plainer language text and illustrations to convey information. People First New Zealand nationally specialises in developing such texts and it would great to see Council adopt some of its major documents (plus others over time) into easy read summaries so people with learning disabilities can access them in the same way as other residents. The local People First branch have indicated their willingness to co-operate with the Council in this endeavour.

Telephone input is another avenue through which people should be able to have a say on policies and plans and this could benefit people from all walks of life and particularly disabled people across the impairment spectrum.

It is pivotal to note too that many disabled people are in the lower socioeconomic quintile of the population and, therefore, mainly unable to afford any broadband, internet or even mobile phone access in some cases. Even so, these technologies (when they are accessible) can be useful in facilitating the inclusion of disabled people. Therefore, that is why we believe that a range of methods should continue to be used to promote the inclusion of all citizens in decision making processes. In this respect, we draw Council’s attention once again to Article 21 of the UN Convention (Freedom of expression and opinion, and access to information).

**Council Disability Issues Advisory Group**

We pointed out in our Annual Plan submission that the Disability Issues Advisory Group had met very infrequently and only when Council chose to consult with the disability community over an issue. While we welcome this engagement and called for the group’s establishment originally, we believe that similar advisory bodies are far better utilised in other centres around New Zealand. In Auckland, for example, their Strategic Disability Advisory Group meets regularly and serves as more of a two-way conduit in terms of providing feedback to Council from the disability community and vice-versa. It is also mainly comprised of disabled people (from across the impairment spectrum) as well as family/whanau and service provider representatives with disabled people themselves dominating its membership. It does not have any direct Councillor representation. Perhaps in the Dunedin case, there is a need to look at this model as a starting point for refreshing and renewing the advisory group.

**Conclusion**

Again, we welcome the DCC’s ongoing dialogue with us at various levels while admitting that this could be further improved. We also welcome and would like to see the proposals that are about to be made on improving access to communication and information for people with sensory impairment. Overall, we look forward to seeing the final Council consultation policy document when it is published with the hope that it will maintain an emphasis (among other things) on accessibility and inclusion in terms of consultative processes.

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1. Statistics New Zealand, *Disability Counts,* May 2001 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Page 3, Minister for Disability Issues, *New Zealand Disability Strategy,* April 2001. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)