

Disability Directorate e-newsletter

June 2020

ISSN 2253-1386

From Adri Isbister Deputy Director-General Disability



Kia ora everyone.

Welcome to the quarterly newsletter.

We're getting back to business as usual and making COVID-19 part of our ongoing work, since it is a long game. But I want to acknowledge all of you – the many care and support workers who have been like gems; the families who have opted to provide support in order to stay safe in your bubbles; the disability support providers who model innovation and agility in this environment; all providers; NASCs; the cross-agency groups we've set up; the unions; disability advocates; and the amazing team here within the Disability Directorate. This has been an unprecedented time, requiring us all to quickly adapt and change to meet new challenges. THANK YOU!

I mentioned many weeks ago that we follow basic steps in order to communicate with the sector and we've worked hard at ensuring accessible communications. To date we have developed 293 resources, including easy read documents, large print HTML, large print docx/PDF and animations (including captions and transcripts). To support this, we brought in other representatives of the sector – you know who you are and you've added huge value. THANK YOU!

You may be aware that the Minister of Health has now received the final New Zealand Health and Disability System Review report. The Review looked at the overall function of the health and disability system and whether the system is balanced towards wellness, access, equity and sustainability. You can find out more about the background to the review on the [Health and Disability System Review website](#). The report will be considered by Cabinet at some point over the next few weeks and I will keep you informed on what the review will mean for the health and disability sector as more information becomes available.

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As I have also said, I feel privileged to work under the guidance and leadership of Dr Ashley Bloomfield who has led us through this period with the greatest integrity and transparency.

Stay safe, listen to the messages from our leaders and as I say to my family 'wash those hands'!

Ngā mihi

Adri

Communications during COVID-19

Dionne Steven, Ministry of Health lead for COVID-19 information for disabled people and the disability sector

Since March 2020, we have had a team of people who have been working with the Disability Directorate on COVID-19-related communications for the disability sector. The team included disabled people and family members and various organisations, bringing together a broad range of skills and experience and ensuring a holistic, multi-perspective approach to issues and content development.

The communications development work was rapid and intensive, with pressure to turn things around quickly. Communications usually centred on what different alert levels meant for disabled people and whānau in terms of disability funding and services, health and wellbeing and day-to-day living, with an emphasis on providing information and resources in plain language and in a range of alternate formats.

A specific section for disabled people and whānau was established on the Ministry website and, later, a short URL for the section was established at health.govt.nz/COVID19-disability

According to the Ministry's National Health Coordination Centre (NHCC), the disability communications team developed more content in response to COVID-19 than any other sector within the Ministry.

The Ministry could not have achieved what it did for disabled people and whānau throughout the COVID-19 response without the help of the people from the University of Otago, Disabled Persons Assembly NZ, Foundation for Equity and Research NZ (FERNZ), the Donald Beasley Institute and Health Literacy. The Directorate is extremely grateful for the time, expertise, insights and passion they have added to the pandemic response. Thank you.

Enabling Good Lives

Christchurch

Hannah Perry, Enabling Good Lives Lead, Christchurch

Tēnā Koutou

It's been a challenging few months. I mihi to the EGL team locally, who have shown dedication, professionalism, creativity and positivity in difficult circumstances. I also acknowledge with gratitude and respect the wider EGL whānau; young people, families, friends and supporters of all kinds. Canterbury has experienced a decade of testing situations.

Over the years, our community has built resilience and a deep understanding that forming meaningful relationships and developing local networks is key to a strong and sustained recovery and future.

Over the COVID-19 lockdown period the EGL team undertook regular check-ins with EGL families, phoning approximately 200 whānau (this included newer families and those that the NASC had identified for various reasons). As always, we utilised the skills and connections of our team to be able to collate and provide comprehensive information, share creative ideas and practical support.

I am constantly amazed and gratified to learn bit by bit just how much help is out there for families . . . to receive a call during lockdown asking if we were ok was just so appreciated.

We also used social media (EGL Christchurch has a closed Facebook page for young people and families) for updates most days – sharing information that was relevant from the Ministry of Health, DPOs and other agencies as well as encouraging people to ask questions, share ideas and links and inspire others to make their days and weeks richer, more manageable and easier to plan.

Thank you, this has helped to clarify a few things I didn't know, particularly when a residential house has a client that gets sick. Thank you for having this site available. Thanks for all your hard work!

EGL whānau are familiar with using funding flexibly and leading up to the lockdown there were some creative purchases that we know made a housebound few weeks a little easier on some young people and families.

- Buying a trampoline two hours before the shops closed meant that a small backyard was much more useable for a young woman (and mum got a break everyday too)!
- Purchasing ingredients for 'slime' meant many hours of happiness for a young person, who now has so much product she can sell some!
- 'I was so appreciative of the call from (EGL) during lockdown where she organised funds for a computer for (young person) which was a huge help with the zoom sessions and class catch ups.'

Instead of 'doing for' people, EGL is about setting the scene so people are better equipped to create good lives for themselves. To that end we always work proactively to connect people with organisations that can assist and then alongside to ensure that families are well served by these →

← agencies. We are really aware that for some families, lockdown exacerbated already hugely difficult situations and in these cases it was a privilege to be able to work in partnership with a team of supporters including food banks, community agencies such as the Salvation Army, Student Volunteer Army, the NASC (LifeLinks), disability providers (in particular SkillWise and CCS Disability Action), community policing and Whānau Ora entities. Comprehensive team work meant that people were safe and housed, had enough food and warm clothing, had access to internet, technology, transport, advocacy and a personal income. Most importantly, people gained skills, confidence and connections, increasing the chances that they can find support themselves in the future.

Good news stories

Some of the 'boutique' organisations locally, many of whom have sprung up over the last few years as a response to the Enabling Good Lives approach for school leavers in Christchurch, have been nimble in their response to engaging online with young disabled people and their families and for many this has meant more connection, more community and more encouragement to communicate.

This is wonderfully illustrated in the Inclusive Performance Academy, who held regular online classes and each week completed a project that was then shared with the wider community. Here is a link to the final [video](#), celebrating reaching Alert Level 2. Much to the performers' delight, Dr Ashley Bloomfield left a thank you message on the Inclusive Performance Academy Facebook page and their video was screened on TV3's The Project!

For some people who take time to communicate and rely on others to interpret their communication attempts, well facilitated online platforms such as Zoom have meant they get the time and space they need. Everyone else in the group can be muted and it is one person's turn to talk (and everyone else's turn to listen). The result has meant that there is more turn-taking and communication is more successful than it is in 'real life'.

One young man was sadly made redundant from his hotel job at the start of the lockdown. He has spent his time at home learning to touch type, significantly increasing his employability!

Another young man found running was essential to his wellbeing. Once alert levels allowed for going further afield, he returned to his favourite place on earth – Rapaki. On 23 May he spent the entire day running up and down this 8km track, [raising funds for Learn Active](#), an organisation that supports a number of EGL participants, during lockdown and in 'real life' providing outdoor adventure activities for young people.

Many families found their much-relied-on respite service was closed and have since created alternative opportunities for family members to have some time apart. This has involved the young person going to stay with a friend, using personal budgets to hire a holiday house or Airbnb to give people a turn at having some time out, having someone come into the house to play games (on screen or off!) with the young person. As regional travel is allowed and domestic tourism encouraged, we look forward to seeing even more creative options for having a break!

EGL Christchurch used technology to link with a range of organisations to help strengthen our relationships and joint working to enable easier navigation and sharing of resources. A highlight was meeting with [Hei Whakapiki Mauri](#) to further establish joint working with whānau and to access much needed resources from [Manaaki 20](#).

We also took the opportunity to initiate conversations with our EGL colleagues in the North and are looking forward to connecting regularly to share resources and further our work together at an operational level, building on our combined experiences, skills, learnings and challenges.

Nāku iti

Waikato

Kate Cosgriff, Director, Enabling Good Lives Lead, Waikato

EGL Waikato's response to COVID-19

The Waikato demonstration was in active planning to respond to COVID-19 for 10 days prior to the Level 4 lockdown. We were acutely aware of the risks for many of the disabled people, families and whānau we support and early contact was made with all those at highest risk.

The EGL approach has always supported people to grow their voice and make decisions for their own life. All disabled people and families who are participating in EGL direct and decide on their disability supports and budget. Each participant also has a tūhono/connector who knows them and their situation well.

With the impending COVID-19 shutdown, connectors initiated key discussions about bubble sizes, support and staff options, people's need for personal protective equipment (PPE) and what unique purchases and arrangements would help people to successfully get through the next 4-6 weeks.

We set up a myriad of unique solutions to support disabled people. Individual support staff have worked flexibly through the shutdown and provided remote supports, families have combined bubbles with the household of a staff member or a respite family, unique outings were set up when young people were in urgent need of a change of scene, family or household members have been paid to provide supports, people have purchased a number of items that assist in staying connected or that add value and security to their life.

An example of a unique remote support arrangement was a family that engaged their usual support worker via Zoom to interact with and supervise their young children while Mum had a shower. If anything went amiss, the worker would text Mum to get out of the shower. This flexible arrangement gave Mum a regular and much needed few minutes to herself each day.

Pre-lockdown, we contacted the Waikato District Health Board, who were really responsive. We established a supply chain for PPE, with boxes ordered and regularly delivered to a team member's home for EGL to distribute to disabled people and families through Level 4 and 3.

The feedback received from EGL participants about the delivery of PPE was overwhelming. People expressed sheer relief, as at the time they couldn't purchase sanitiser, masks or gloves:

We went into hospital just as lockdown four happened and had no time to prepare and then were exited under really stressful circumstances to nurse our son at home. We called EGL and had the PPE within an hour of coming home. It was an efficient and timely service and made a huge difference to us as we needed to get our support workers back within 24 hours of getting home.

Thank you. I don't have spare hand sanitiser so it would be very, very helpful, thanks.

Thank you for getting the PPE to me. I am an older carer. Having the PPE service means I could get my grandchild to pick up essential medications and our groceries safely without putting my family at risk. Thank you.

Amazing as I haven't got any and I don't want to go out. →



Being positioned within MSD and having wide community networks was helpful to ensure people could access financial assistance and food support. The team gained a good understanding of how other agencies and schools were responding to families.

The EGL team has successfully worked remotely and been in regular contact with all participants through the shutdown for connection, support and finding solutions. We have provided regular communication to all disabled people and families participating in EGL, including advice on staff payment options, the Government leave schemes, PPE and information released from the Ministry of Health.

Thank you for checking in with us at this strange time. We really appreciate it and I'm really happy to hear that some of our most vulnerable whanau are still being taken care of with EGL.

I really really appreciate your support as I have no one else, I really want to thank you

Tena Koe

Thank you and the team for keeping us well informed throughout the whole COVID-19 as it has been reassuring as I'm sure not only for me and my whanau but all that rely on this help.

Nga mihi kia Koutou Katoa

Thanks so much for all you do for us, you just make everything easy.

From our providers

Communication Skills

The TalkLink Trust operates nationally to enable people with communication impairments to interact and participate to their full potential.

The Trust helps people, for example, to produce intelligible speech, to process receptive or expressive language or to use communication assistive technology.

Communication equipment includes low-tech options such as core communication boards and alphabet boards and high-tech options such as speech generating devices, computers with communication software and voice amplifiers.

The TalkLink team consists of speech-language therapists, occupational therapists, teachers and technicians.

TalkLink has run KiwiChat groups for several years. The initiative was developed to support people who are learning to use communication assistive technology tools and strategies. The aim is to create fun-filled sessions of learning and sharing, with the goal to support people who use these tools and strategies to become competent communicators.

KiwiChat Groups have regularly been held around the country. With the lockdown making it impossible to run KiwiChat groups for the foreseeable future, TalkLink decided, with some trepidation, to run a virtual KiwiChat group.





The first ever virtual KiwiChat group, on the theme animals, happened on 30 April 2020 with minimal advertising through Facebook and by word-of-mouth. There were 58 participants from around the country and the outcome was a session that far exceeded expectations. Families embraced web-based meeting technology and the engagement and enthusiasm of the students participating in the session was remarkable.

Feedback from participants included:

- today's session was awesome, thank you. [Name] seldom concentrates for that long! Will use the story and follow up activities for the next few days
- we have never met other children who use talking devices before. Really appreciate this
- I really benefitted from seeing [the presenter] use her coreboard in this teaching session.

The TalkLink Trust has been providing communication assistive technology services for 25 years. The Trust is the national provider for specialised services for a diverse group of people with complex communication needs. The service has expertise in communication for people of all ages who due to an impairment have difficulty with, for example, speaking, writing and learning. This requires skills and expertise in assessment and provision of and training with complex devices to augment the person's communication.

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