



## **Inclusion in ACE**

The ACE Disability Network has worked hard over the past twelve months on its *Inclusive Strategies in ACE* project. The project, funded by ACFE, extended the work and achievements of the Network in enhancing the educational, vocational, social and individual outcomes for people with disabilities accessing the ACE sector. The *Inclusive Strategies in ACE* (ISA) project and the work of the ACE Disability Network addressed the gap in knowledge and practice of inclusion across the statewide ACE sector. The key components of the project were directed around promoting and supporting disability awareness and inclusive practices among ACE providers. Strategies were developed to better inform, educate and resource the ACE sector so that providers are more responsive to the needs of learners with disabilities. Underpinning the project was recognition that inclusive practices not only improve the educational pathways of learners with disabilities but also enhance the organisational capacity of educational providers to meet the diverse needs of their communities

During the twelve months the Network worked with specific neighbourhood houses to improve the inclusive aspects of their organisational cultures. This involved conducting inclusion audits which explored the organisations at all levels and people with a disability in the community in order to identify what policies and procedures needed to be put into place to effect better inclusion. In addition a comprehensive disability action plan was designed for individual houses.

Another positive outcome of the ISA project involved linking two rural neighbourhood houses– Camperdown and District Neighbourhood House and Shepparton ACE– with local disability providers. These partnerships have provided a number of people with disabilities the opportunity to access adult education in a community setting for the first time.

A large part of the project involved working across the statewide sector delivering disability awareness education and training to ACE providers. A significant component of this involved developing a fully accessible website: [www.acedisability.org.au](http://www.acedisability.org.au). As many of you may be aware, the website is a fantastic resource for both education providers and learners with disabilities. Information is provided on such things as inclusion and how to better include people with disabilities into ACE organisations; disability action plans, legislation, how to effectively establish and sustain effective partnerships and so on.

The ACE Disability Network would like to thank all those people and organisations who worked with us during the course of the ISA project and helped make it a great success!

### **Disability Action Plans**

The Network has recently received many calls from providers confused about how to construct a disability action plan. Many have asked for a 'template'. Firstly, it should be stressed that no template for such a plan exists and, in fact, defeats the purpose of constructing a disability action plan altogether. A disability action plan is a process and needs to be conducted in consultation in with your Committee of Management, tutors and other staff as well as learners with disabilities who access your centre. Disability action plans not only act as a guide to actions and responsibilities but as a mechanism to address systemic issues that inhibit a person with a disability access to your centre.

Whilst disability action plans are not compulsory they do, however, constitute *good practice*. They also demonstrate that you have made every attempt to address hidden and more overt forms of discrimination. This is of particular importance with the Disability Standards for Education now enforceable. The Disability Standards for Education were introduced in August 2005 and sit alongside the Disability Discrimination Act. The Standards are intended to give students with disabilities the same rights as other students and overcome discrimination based on stereotyped beliefs about the abilities and choices of students with disabilities.

The Standards are as legally enforceable as the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA), meaning it is unlawful to breach the standards. The Standards cover enrolment, participation, curriculum development, accreditation delivery, student support services and the elimination of harassment and victimisation.

Action Plans are a voluntary mechanism whereby organisations and learning centres can develop policies that address systemic disability discrimination and remove or correct this.

### **Disability Action Plan Service**

Did you know that the ACE Disability Network offers a fee for service consultation on constructing a disability action plan for your organisation. The Network can:

- Conduct an inclusion audit of your organisation
- Review your policies and procedures
- Offer advice to staff on disability related issues
- Provide you with a disability action plan upon completion of the audit and consultation process

### **Get Your FREE Inclusion Resource Kit now!**

The Network has developed a disability resource kit that is free to providers (although we do ask a small fee for postage and handling). Included in the resource kits are a CD of disability specific information and support referrals for providers, information on how the Network can assist you working with people with disabilities and a series of three educational inclusion posters.

The posters were designed specifically for the learning environment. Brightly coloured, they contain key messages around creating a vibrant learning environment and embracing the diversity of your community. They are simple yet effective learning tools for any educational setting and have proven to be a hit with many providers (as demonstrated by the amount that were snapped up at the ANHLC's annual conference earlier this year).

### ***Bon Voyage!***

The ACE Disability Network is sad to lose one of its key project workers– Louise Oswald. Louise left the Network in August to take up a position with WISE employment services where she will continue her work with passion for people with disabilities in the area of employment. The Network thanks Louise for her two years work with the Network and wishes her all the best in her new vocation.

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