Disabled People and Marginalisation in New Zealand: A Comprehensive Analysis

by Glen McMillan

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I've authored this comprehensive guide to serve as an illuminating resource on disability-related issues and the prevailing gaps in awareness within New Zealand's social landscape.

Meticulously researched and candidly presented, the book delves into the intricacies of why systemic changes are overdue. With over five decades of lived experience as a disabled individual, I have witnessed stagnation where progress is urgently needed.

My series of in-depth e-books sheds light on these pervasive issues and lays them bare for public scrutiny.

It's time we move from recognition to actionable change.

Authored by Glen McMillan
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Disabled People and Marginalisation in New Zealand: A Comprehensive Analysis 2023

Disclaimer: This book is a general overview and should not be taken as a representation of all disabled individuals' experiences in New Zealand. The intention is to shed light on systemic issues that may contribute to marginalisation.

This resource is accessible for digital download from our website, Children with Disability NZ, in both e-book and PDF formats for your convenience. The document is enriched with hyperlinks that direct you to comprehensive e-books and PDFs. Each link is designed to open in a separate window, allowing for seamless navigation.

Table of Contents

Introduction

New Zealand is often viewed as a progressive nation with a strong commitment to social justice and inclusivity. However, when it comes to the issues facing disabled people, the country still has a long way to go. Disabled individuals in New Zealand experience various forms of marginalisation, ranging from social and economic barriers to institutionalised discrimination. This book aims to delve into the reasons why disabled people could be considered the most marginalised group in New Zealand.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Overview

In the heart of the South Pacific, New Zealand stands as a beacon of progressive values, advocating for social justice, inclusivity, and equitable access to resources and opportunities. Yet, beneath this outward semblance of fairness and equality lies a more complicated reality for one specific demographic: disabled individuals. Despite its reputation, New Zealand grapples with systemic issues that impede the full participation of disabled people in society.

The struggles faced by disabled individuals in New Zealand are multifaceted and deeply rooted, encompassing social, economic, and institutional barriers. The challenges are numerous and pervasive, from limited access to quality healthcare and education to unequal employment opportunities and social stigmas. This book aims to unpack these complexities, seeking to understand why disabled individuals appear be the most marginalised group in New Zealand today.

Purpose and Scope

The central objective of this book is to provide an in-depth analysis of the myriad factors that contribute to the marginalisation of disabled people in New Zealand. Drawing on empirical data, personal narratives, and historical context, this book will aim to:

Examine the legal frameworks and public policies that either help or hinder the inclusivity of disabled people in New Zealand.

Explore societal attitudes and perceptions that contribute to the stigmatisation and exclusion of disabled individuals.

Investigate the economic constraints disproportionately affecting disabled people, impacting their access to healthcare, education, and employment.

Evaluate existing support systems and propose viable solutions to mitigate the challenges faced by disabled individuals.

Significance

While New Zealand has made strides in various sectors, such as gender equality and LGBTQ+ rights, the plight of disabled individuals often remains overshadowed. By bringing these issues to light, this book aims to contribute to an ongoing dialogue about how New Zealand can become a truly inclusive society.

Methodology

This book will use an interdisciplinary approach to offer a comprehensive view, combining sociological, economics, law, and healthcare studies methodologies. Research methods will include interviews, surveys, case studies, and government documents and legislation analysis.

Outline

The Legal Landscape: Discuss the existing laws and policies to protect disabled individuals.

Social Perceptions and Stigmas: Delving into societal attitudes and their impact on the day-to-day experiences of disabled people.

Economic Barriers: Examining the economic constraints and their role in marginalising disabled individuals.

Healthcare and Education: Investigating access to quality healthcare and educational opportunities.

Voices from the Margins: Sharing personal narratives from disabled individuals to capture the human aspect of these issues.

Towards Inclusion: Proposing policy recommendations and practical solutions to create a more inclusive environment.

Putting integrity at the core of how public organisations operate

Integrity helps build and maintain trust and confidence.

https://oag.parliament.nz/good-practice/integrity/integrity-framework/about-integrity.htm

The public's trust and confidence in public organisations determine their levels of participation in public services and compliance with requirements. This ultimately determines public organisations' ongoing social licence to operate.

Conclusion

The journey towards a more equitable and inclusive society is long and challenging. This book aims to be a steppingstone in that journey, offering a nuanced understanding of the issues faced by disabled people in New Zealand. By dissecting the systemic barriers and cultural norms that perpetuate their marginalisation, we can begin to enact meaningful change.

Chapter 2 Historical Context
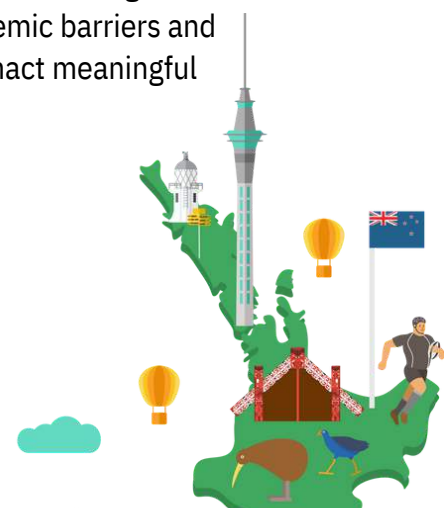
To fully understand the current situation, one must examine the history of disabled people in New Zealand. From colonial practices to more recent policies, disabled individuals have often been pushed to the peripheries of society. This section will highlight significant events and policies contributing to the ongoing marginalisation.

The history of disability in New Zealand reflects the country's broader social, cultural, and political contexts. Here are some key historical points to consider:

Colonial Period

During the colonial period, the views and treatment of disabled individuals were heavily influenced by European attitudes, which often focused on institutionalisation and exclusion from mainstream society. While Māori perspectives on disability included a more community-focused approach, colonisation disrupted many of these practices.

Post-War Era

After World War II, the increase in disabled veterans necessitated rethinking disability policy. However, most of these policies were still exclusionary, relegating disabled people to institutions and segregating them from the general population. During this period, eugenics also impacted policy decisions, stigmatising those with disabilities.

Disability Rights Movement

In the latter half of the 20th century, the disability rights movement began to gain momentum in New Zealand, as it did in many other parts of the world. Activists worked to move the focus away from a 'medical model' of disability, which perceived disability as a condition to be 'fixed,' to a 'social model,' which saw disability because of societal barriers rather than individual limitations.

Individuals with disabilities are overrepresented in prison populations.

A 2017 report from the Office of the Ombudsman in New Zealand found that many prisoners had difficulty accessing mental health services and that some prisoners with disabilities were kept in conditions that could be considered degrading.

Looking at dyslexia alone, an estimated 10% of the New Zealand population is dyslexic, yet percentages climb as high as 90% in our prisons

https://www.dyslexiafoundation.org.nz/dyslexia_advocacy/justice.php

1993 Human Rights Act

This act marked a significant milestone in acknowledging the rights of disabled people in New Zealand. The Act included disability as a prohibited ground of discrimination, offering legal protections that had not existed before.

The New Zealand Disability Strategy

Introduced in 2001 and revised in 2016, the New Zealand Disability Strategy aimed to improve the well-being and living standards of disabled people by removing barriers to participation. However, implementation and effectiveness have been subjects of debate.

Education

Historically, disabled children were segregated in schools or not educated. The Education for All movement, influenced by global initiatives, has pushed for inclusive education, but gaps still exist.

Inclusive Beginnings Preparing Schools for Children with Diverse Abilities

READ e-BOOK HERE

Current Policy Landscape

New Zealand has ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and various initiatives and policies like the Health and Disability System Review aim to provide better and more equitable services for disabled people.

Despite these strides, challenges such as underemployment, social isolation, and unequal access to services persist for disabled individuals in New Zealand. These issues are often exacerbated for Māori and Pacific people with disabilities due to systemic inequities.

Conclusion

Understanding the historical context of disability in New Zealand is crucial for comprehending the issues facing disabled individuals today. From colonial mindsets to modern policy, the experience of disability in New Zealand has been shaped by various influences that have often resulted in marginalisation. Yet, steps are being taken to improve the situation, influenced by both local and international advocacy and policy frameworks.

Chapter 3 Social Barriers
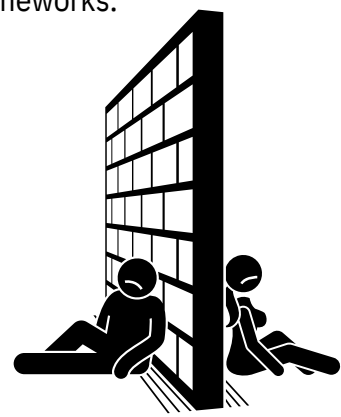
Stigma, ignorance, and lack of awareness create significant social barriers for disabled people. Despite some progress in society's attitudes, ableism remains a significant issue. Disabled individuals often face social exclusion, which manifests in various aspects, such as employment, education, and daily interactions.

The issue of social barriers faced by disabled people is complex and multi-dimensional, involving cultural, societal, and institutional elements that work in tandem to perpetuate ableism.

A deeper comprehension of the nuances of various disabilities is essential for fostering an inclusive environment. To truly understand disability is to embrace acceptance.

The top ten most common learning disabilities

READ e-BOOK HERE

Below are some of the ways these social barriers manifest:

Stigma

Negative Stereotypes: Disabled people are often stereotyped as being less capable, less intelligent, or more dependent, which can impact how they are treated in multiple settings, from the workplace to healthcare systems.

Invisibility: Disability is often rendered "invisible" when conversations about diversity and inclusion are had, leading to the further marginalisation of disabled individuals.

Mental Health Stigma: For individuals with invisible disabilities, like mental health conditions, the stigma can be twofold. There is often a lack of understanding, which can lead to isolation.

Ignorance

Lack of Understanding: Able-bodied individuals might not fully understand the challenges disabled people face, which can result in unintentional exclusion.

Inadequate Training: Teachers, employers, and service providers may lack the training needed to make spaces more accessible, both physically and in terms of information and communication.

TEACHING IS A WORK OF HEART

Overlooked Needs: Whether failing to provide sign language interpreters or not considering accessibility in public transport planning, ignorance often leads to neglect of specific needs.

Lack of Awareness

Unseen Barriers: People may not even know they're perpetuating social barriers. For example, using ableist language like "lame" or "crazy" can contribute to a culture of exclusion.

Media Representation: Poor or inadequate representation of disabled individuals in the media contributes to a lack of awareness. When disabled people are portrayed, it often falls into tropes like "inspirational" stories or as objects of pity.

Systemic Issues: There is a general lack of awareness of how systemic issues impact disabled individuals, such as policies that make healthcare less accessible or the absence of necessary adaptive technologies in the workplace.

Employment and Education

Job Discrimination: Employers may consciously or unconsciously discriminate against disabled applicants, viewing them as less competent or more costly to accommodate.

Educational Barriers: Disabled students face barriers from kindergarten through higher education, ranging from a lack of accessible facilities to inadequate specialised support. I have written e-books on this subject.

**Inclusive Beginnings Preparing Schools for Children with Diverse Abilities**
READ e-BOOK HERE

Transitioning Young Disabled People from School into Work
READ e-BOOK HERE

Social Exclusion in Daily Interactions

Social Activities: Whether going out for a meal or engaging in recreational activities, social spaces are often not built with disabled people in mind.
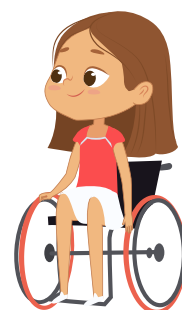
Microaggressions: Small comments or actions, perhaps unintentional, can have a cumulative effect that adds to the experience of social exclusion for disabled individuals.

Negative language towards disabled people Disability language - words matter

https://www.msd.govt.nz/about-msd-and-our-work/work-programmes/accessibility/quick-reference-guides/disability-language-words-matter.html

Initiatives to Break Down Barriers

Education and Training: Educating the public and training professionals about disabilities can help break down ignorance and stigma.

Policy Changes: Implementing and strictly enforcing laws related to disabled people's rights can help reduce discrimination.

Community Engagement: Activism, support groups, and media engagement can offer a platform for disabled individuals to share their experiences and fight against social barriers.

To build a society that is truly inclusive, it is critical to address these social barriers through concerted efforts across all sectors.

Chapter 4 Economic Barriers

The economic disadvantages facing disabled people in New Zealand are staggering. They have higher rates of unemployment and underemployment. When employed, they often receive lower wages than non-disabled individuals for similar work. This section will explore the economic implications of being disabled in New Zealand.

As of September 2021, New Zealand, like many other countries, faces various economic barriers that disproportionately affect disabled people. While some progress has been made to enhance the inclusion and well-being of disabled people, significant challenges remain. It's essential to consider the systemic nature of these economic barriers to find effective solutions that improve the quality of life and economic independence of disabled individuals.

Unemployment and Underemployment

Disabled people in New Zealand have higher unemployment rates than the general population. This is often due to societal attitudes, employer biases, and systemic issues that

make it difficult for disabled people to secure employment. Even when they find work, it may not be in their field of interest or expertise, leading to underemployment.

Wage Gap

Another economic barrier is the wage gap between disabled and non-disabled workers. Even when employed in similar roles, disabled individuals often earn less. This can be attributed to factors like lower starting salaries, fewer promotions, and less access to job training and development programs.

Accessibility

Workplaces are not always accessible to everyone. Physical infrastructure, such as ramps or elevators, may be lacking. However, accessibility is not just about physical spaces; it's also about digital accessibility and flexible work arrangements, which can be critical for people with different kinds of impairments.

Education and Skill Development

Limited access to quality education and vocational training can be a significant economic barrier. This could limit career prospects and earning potential, exacerbating economic inequalities.

Transportation

Public transportation is often not fully accessible to disabled people, limiting their employment opportunities to areas they can easily reach.

Systemic Discrimination

Implicit biases, stereotypes, and systemic discrimination can deter employers from hiring disabled individuals. Many employers may not be aware of the government support and grants that can assist in making workplaces more accessible or think accommodating a disabled employee would be too expensive or complicated.

This information aims to assist government agencies in developing their reasonable accommodation (workplace adjustments) policies and procedures. Most agencies have policies around worksite assessments and flexible working, but these do not include the full range of workplace accommodations that could be available.

Health Costs

Disabled individuals often have higher healthcare costs, which can become a financial burden, further deepening their economic disadvantages.

Social Welfare

While social welfare systems aim to support disabled individuals, they can sometimes have the unintended consequence of discouraging work due to income and asset tests that penalise earnings, creating a "welfare trap."

Beneficiaries earning abatement.

In New Zealand, WINZ (Work and Income New Zealand) provides financial support to individuals and families in need through various benefit programs. Earnings abatement is a term related to how beneficiaries' income from work can affect their eligibility for and the amount of their benefit payments. Here are some details on beneficiaries' earnings abatement in the context of WINZ:

Earnings Abatement Threshold: WINZ sets a threshold for the amount of income a beneficiary can earn from employment before it affects their benefit payments. This threshold varies depending on the specific benefit and individual circumstances.

Types of Benefits: Different benefits provided by WINZ may have different rules regarding earnings abatement. Common types of benefits in New Zealand include the Unemployment Benefit, Sole Parent Support, and Supported Living Payment, among others.

Earnings Abatement Rates: When a beneficiary's earnings exceed the threshold, their benefit payments are reduced by a certain rate for each dollar earned above the threshold. These rates can also vary based on the type of benefit and the individual's circumstances.

Reporting Income: Beneficiaries are typically required to report their income to WINZ regularly. This reporting helps WINZ adjust their benefit payments based on the beneficiary's actual earnings.

Calculating Earnings Abatement: The specific calculation for earnings abatement depends on the benefit type and other factors. It's important for beneficiaries to understand how their earnings will affect their benefit payments and to report income accurately to WINZ.

Benefit Recipients: Earnings abatement rules apply to people who are receiving benefits and who also have some level of income from employment. The purpose of these rules is to ensure that people who can work and earning an income are encouraged to do so while still receiving some level of support.

Exemptions and Special Rules: There may be exemptions or special rules for certain groups of beneficiaries, such as those with disabilities or health conditions. These exemptions can affect how earnings are abated.

Work Incentives: The earnings abatement system is designed to provide incentives for beneficiaries to work and earn income without facing an immediate reduction in their benefit payments that equals their earnings.

It's essential for beneficiaries in New Zealand to familiarise themselves with the specific rules and thresholds that apply to their situation. WINZ provides guidance and resources to help beneficiaries understand how their earnings will affect their benefit payments. It's advisable to consult the official WINZ website or contact WINZ directly for the most up-to-date and accurate information regarding earnings abatement and other benefit-related matters.

Winz Income deduction tables HERE

Policy Recommendations

Anti-Discrimination Laws: Strengthen laws that protect against discrimination in employment based on disability.

Incentives for Employers: Offer tax incentives to companies that hire disabled people and make their workplaces accessible.

Higher income abatements for Employees: encourage disabled and non-disabled into work by raising benefit abatement amounts.

Accessibility Audits: Mandate regular accessibility audits for businesses to ensure physical and digital inclusivity.

Education and Training: Improve access to quality education and training programs tailored for disabled individuals.

Public Transportation: Invest in making public transport more accessible.

Universal Design: Adopt universal design principles in public infrastructure projects.

Public Awareness: Engage in campaigns to change societal attitudes and employer biases towards disabled individuals.

Healthcare Support: Provide financial assistance or subsidised healthcare to lower the health costs for disabled individuals.

Welfare Reform: Adjust social welfare systems to encourage rather than penalise work.

The economic disadvantages faced by disabled people are a complex issue that requires a multi-faceted approach involving legislation, education, public awareness, and systemic change.

Chapter 5 Accessibility Issues

Accessibility is another crucial aspect where disabled people are marginalised. Public spaces, services, and even information are often not accessible, further limiting the participation of disabled individuals in society. From public transportation to digital platforms, disabled individuals face numerous obstacles.

Accessibility issues indeed represent a significant barrier to inclusion for people with disabilities, affecting multiple areas of life and reinforcing social inequities. The importance of accessibility can't be overstated as a human right and a critical component of social justice. Let's look at some key areas where these issues are evident:
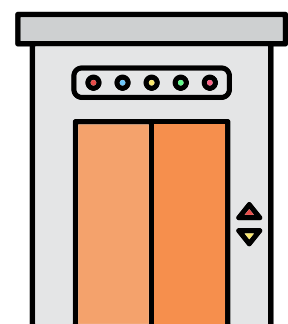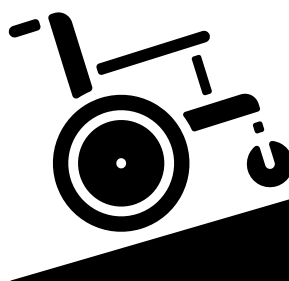
Public Spaces

Building Design: Many buildings lack ramps, elevators, or modified restrooms, making it difficult for people with mobility impairments to access them.

Transportation: Public transportation options are often inadequate to accommodate people with disabilities. For example, buses may not have proper lifting mechanisms or train stations may lack visual aids for the visually impaired.

Digital Accessibility

Websites: Many websites are not designed with accessibility in mind, lacking alternative text for images, captions for videos, or easy navigation methods for those who can't use a mouse.

Software: Similarly, many everyday software applications do not have features that make them usable by people with disabilities, such as screen readers or voice commands.

Services

Healthcare: Not all healthcare facilities are accessible, and equipment like MRI machines or examination tables often aren't designed to accommodate people with disabilities.

Education: Educational material often lacks alternative formats like Braille or large print, and not all schools are physically accessible.

Information Access

Emergency Services: Emergency instructions are often only communicated in formats that are not accessible to everyone, leaving some people more vulnerable.

Media: Newspapers, television, and other media frequently lack accessible features like subtitles or sign language interpretation.

Legislation

While laws like the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in the United States aim to make public spaces more accessible, implementation is often lacking, and many countries do not have similar legislation at all.

Economic Implications

Lack of accessibility not only impacts the well-being of people with disabilities but also has economic repercussions. When public spaces and services are inaccessible, it limits the extent to which disabled individuals can participate in the workforce, contribute to the economy, and live independently.

Social and Psychological Impact

Accessibility issues can also lead to social isolation and mental health issues for people with disabilities, reinforcing a vicious cycle of marginalisation.

To address these issues, a concerted effort is required from governments, businesses, and civil society to prioritise accessibility in design, legislation, and social consciousness. Advances in technology offer some solutions, but a shift in societal attitudes is essential for real change.

Health Disparities

Healthcare, one of the most basic human rights, is yet another arena where disabled people face marginalisation. From limited access to healthcare services to the lack of specialised care, this chapter will discuss the health disparities affecting disabled individuals.

Chapter 6: Health Disparities Among Disabled Individuals

Introduction

The right to quality healthcare is fundamental to the well-being of all individuals, but access to this right is not uniformly distributed across society. Disabled individuals face unique and often systemic challenges in securing quality healthcare. This chapter will delve into the intricacies of these disparities and discuss potential solutions to create a more equitable healthcare landscape for disabled people.

Types of Health Disparities

Physical Accessibility

Many healthcare facilities are not fully accessible to people with mobility impairments. From the lack of ramps and elevators to inaccessible examination rooms and diagnostic equipment, the physical barriers can be the first, yet insurmountable, hurdle.

Communication Barriers

Deaf and hard-of-hearing patients often face significant barriers in communication, as not all facilities provide interpreters or alternative methods of communication. This impacts the patient's ability to understand their diagnosis and treatment options and can result in incorrect or missed diagnoses.

Mysteries of the Human Body: A Journey into Rare Disorders

The importance of understanding rare disorders.

Defining "rare": Prevalence and incidence

In the vast landscape of medicine, diseases are often categorised based on their prevalence among the population. While conditions such as heart disease, diabetes, and common cancers are widely recognised and researched, rare disorders often get overshadowed. However, understanding and addressing these disorders is immensely important for various reasons. Let's explore why these conditions matter and define what qualifies a disorder as "rare."

Why Understanding Rare Disorders Matters

READ e-BOOK HERE

Stereotyping and Bias

Healthcare providers are not immune from societal prejudices and may unconsciously treat disabled patients with less attention or lower expectations, impacting the quality of care they receive.

Lack of Specialised Care

Individuals with specialised healthcare needs, such as those with intellectual and developmental disabilities, often find that healthcare providers are not trained to deal with their specific needs.

Financial Barriers

Healthcare costs can be significantly higher for disabled individuals, yet many face financial barriers such as lower income levels or inadequate insurance coverage, further widening the healthcare disparity.

Effects of Disparities

Lower Quality of Life: Reduced access to healthcare directly impacts the well-being and lifespan of disabled individuals.

Increased Comorbidity: The lack of preventative care can increase the risk of other health conditions.

Psychological Effects: Feeling marginalised within the healthcare system can increase stress, anxiety, and depression.

Social Effects: The inability to access healthcare equitably also affects social integration, job prospects, and overall societal participation.

Potential Solutions

Policy Changes

Universal Design: Encouraging or mandating universal design principles in healthcare architecture can reduce physical barriers.

Training and Education: Healthcare providers should undergo sensitivity and inclusivity training to reduce biases.

Coverage Expansion: Policies should aim to cover more specialised treatments required by disabled individuals.

Technological Advancements

Telemedicine: Remote consultations can ease transportation burdens.

Accessible Medical Devices: Development of medical equipment designed for disabled patients.

Community Involvement

Advocacy: Organisations can advocate for policy changes and raise awareness.

Peer Support: Community-based support groups can offer advice and emotional support.

Conclusion

Reducing health disparities for disabled individuals is not just a medical issue, but a societal one that demands multi-dimensional solutions, including changes in policy, technology, and societal attitudes. The fight for a more equitable healthcare system for all must prioritise the needs and experiences of disabled individuals to truly be effective.

Legal Framework

New Zealand has several laws and policies aimed at promoting inclusivity and accessibility. However, these often fall short in practice. This chapter will review the legal landscape affecting disabled people, including gaps in legislation and enforcement.

Chapter 7: Legal Framework for Disabled People in New Zealand

Introduction

New Zealand has long prided itself on its efforts to create a society that values diversity, inclusivity, and accessibility. Over the years, the country has adopted various laws, policies, and guidelines to promote these values for all citizens, including those with disabilities. However, there are criticisms that the legal framework falls short in practice, particularly regarding implementation and enforcement. This chapter will review key laws and policies affecting disabled people in New Zealand and discuss their gaps and challenges.

Key Legislation

The New Zealand Human Rights Act 1993

The Human Rights Act prohibits discrimination on the grounds of disability and aims to promote equal opportunities for everyone. However, critics argue that the Act lacks the specificity needed to address various forms of discrimination that disabled people face, from employment to access services.

The New Zealand Public Health and Disability Act 2000

This Act aims to provide more equitable access to health services and disability support. However, problems in the distribution of resources and services can leave some disabled individuals underserved.

The Building Act 2004

While the Act does provide regulations concerning accessibility in new building designs, there are still many existing structures that are not accessible, leaving a significant gap in physical accessibility for disabled individuals.

The Education Act 1989

The Act includes provisions to ensure that disabled children have equal access to education. However, lacking facilities, trained staff, and specialised educational materials often makes this a challenge.

Gaps in Legislation

Lack of Enforcement

Many of the existing laws lack a stringent enforcement mechanism, making it difficult to hold violators accountable.

Vague Guidelines

The guidelines for implementing the laws are often not specific enough, making it difficult for organisations to comply and for individuals to seek justice.

Intersectionality

Current laws do not adequately address the intersectionality that exists between disability and other factors such as gender, race, and socioeconomic status, leading to multiple layers of discrimination.

No Comprehensive Disability Act

Unlike some countries, New Zealand does not have a comprehensive Disability Act that brings together various aspects affecting disabled people.

Challenges in Implementation and Enforcement

Resource Allocation

There is a lack of sufficient resources allocated to make public spaces, services, and information accessible.

Public Awareness

Limited public awareness and stigma associated with disability continue to be barriers to fully realising disabled people's rights.

Monitoring and Reporting

There is insufficient data collection and monitoring to measure the effectiveness of laws and policies.

Recommendations

Enact a comprehensive Disability Act that consolidates various provisions relating to disabled people.

Strengthen the enforcement mechanisms for existing laws and policies.

Develop more specific guidelines and standards for accessibility and inclusivity.

Allocate more resources towards implementation and public awareness campaigns.

Establish robust monitoring and reporting mechanisms.

Conclusion

While New Zealand has made strides in legislation aimed at promoting inclusivity and accessibility for disabled people, there remains much work to be done. Gaps in legislation, implementation, and enforcement challenges pose significant barriers to fully realising disabled people's rights. It is imperative for these gaps to be addressed through revising existing legislation and adopting new policies. Only then can New Zealand truly become a society that is inclusive and accessible for all.

Media Representation

Media significantly influences public perception, and its representation of disabled people is often lacking or stereotypical. This chapter delves into how media shapes societal views and contributes to the marginalisation of disabled individuals.

Chapter 8: Media Representation

Introduction

In its various forms—television, movies, news outlets, and social media—media plays a monumental role in shaping public opinion and societal norms. Its power to influence cannot be overstated, and that's precisely why the representation of disabled people in the media is a topic of concern. All too often, disabled individuals are either invisible within the media landscape or are portrayed through limiting stereotypes. This chapter aims to delve into how media shapes societal views and contributes to the marginalisation of disabled individuals.

The Invisible Minority

One of the most glaring issues in media representation is the invisibility of disabled people. According to various studies, disabled individuals make up a tiny percentage of characters portrayed in mainstream films, television shows, and advertising. They are often relegated to the periphery when they appear, seldom given a narrative focus. This invisibility perpetuates a form of societal 'othering,' wherein disabled people are unconsciously considered less relevant or important.

The Stereotypes

Disabled people are visible in the media and often depicted through narrow stereotypes. Some common tropes include:

The Inspirational Figure: Disabled individuals are portrayed as inspirations meant to serve as life lessons for non-disabled people.

The Tragic Character: Often, disabled characters are depicted as pitiful or tragic figures who exist primarily to elicit emotional responses from the audience.

The Evil or Sinister Disabled: This stereotype portrays disabled individuals as villains, often attributing their 'evilness' to their disability.

The Superhuman: Particularly in superhero genres, disabled people are sometimes depicted with extraordinary abilities that 'compensate' for their disability, reducing their character to a mere plot device.

The Real-World Consequences

The media's flawed portrayal of disabled individuals has real-world implications:

Discrimination: Stereotypes contribute to bias, discrimination, and a lack of understanding, making it more difficult for disabled people to integrate fully into society.

Policy Impact: Public perception, shaped by media, can influence policies related to disability rights, healthcare, and employment.

Self-Perception: Seeing oneself depicted poorly in media can lead to a negative self-image among disabled individuals, affecting their self-esteem and mental health.

Changing the Narrative

Diverse Storytelling: There is a need for stories that portray disabled individuals in all their complexity, as fully developed characters rather than stereotypes.
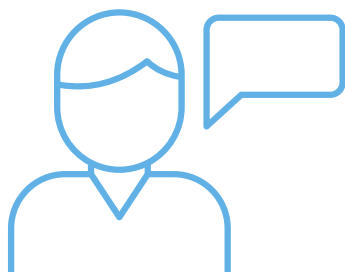
Authentic Casting: Hiring disabled actors to portray disabled characters lends authenticity and helps break down barriers in the entertainment industry.

Inclusive Writing Rooms: The stories of disabled people should be told by or with input from disabled people. Having disabled writers, producers, and consultants can lead to more accurate and nuanced portrayals.

Media Literacy: Education about the power and influence of media can arm the public with the critical thinking skills needed to challenge stereotypes and demand better representation.

Conclusion

The media wields immense power in shaping societal attitudes, and it has a responsibility to portray all members of society, including disabled individuals, in a fair, nuanced, and respectful manner. Changing the narrative around disability representation in the media is not just a matter of social justice but a necessary step for societal progress.

Chapter 9 Case Studies

Real-world examples often tell the story more vividly than statistics and analyses. This section will include case studies that bring to life the experiences of disabled people in New Zealand, highlighting the multiple layers of marginalisation they face.

Certainly, case studies provide a qualitative perspective that statistics may miss, offering a deeper understanding of the day-to-day experiences of disabled individuals. Here are three case studies illustrating the multi-faceted issues affecting the disabled community in New Zealand:

Case Study 1: Amelia—Accessibility and Employment

Amelia, a wheelchair user living in Auckland, has a master's degree in psychology. Despite her qualifications, she struggled to find employment due to the inaccessibility of many offices and a general lack of understanding of the needs of disabled employees. Employers often hesitated to hire her, citing concerns about "logistical issues" rather than assessing her professional capabilities. When she finally secured a job, she had to advocate for basic accessibility features such as ramps and an accessible restroom.

Challenges Faced:

Employment Discrimination

Lack of Physical Accessibility in Workplaces

Societal Stereotyping

Case Study 2: Tama—Education and Inclusion

Tama is a 12-year-old with autism living in Wellington. Although New Zealand has policies in place to include children with disabilities in mainstream education, Tama's experience has been challenging. While the school he attends professes to be inclusive, there's a lack of trained professionals who can address his needs. This results in him often being sidelined in group activities and struggling academically.

Challenges Faced:

Inadequate Educational Support

Social Exclusion

Lack of Trained Staff in Educational Institutions

Case Study 3: Hinemoa—Healthcare and Indigenous Communities

Hinemoa is a Māori woman in her 60s who lives in a rural community. She has multiple sclerosis and faces compounded difficulties both as an indigenous person and as someone with a disability. Due to the remoteness of her location, medical facilities are scarce. Additionally, cultural insensitivity among healthcare providers sometimes results in her not receiving optimal care.

Challenges Faced:

Lack of Accessible Healthcare

Cultural Insensitivity

Geographic Isolation

These case studies illustrate the multi-layered marginalisation of disabled individuals in New Zealand, encompassing issues from employment discrimination to inadequacies in healthcare and education. Addressing these challenges requires systemic change, supported by a robust policy framework recognising the intersectionality of various forms of marginalisation.

Case Study 4: Sarah from Wellington

In a small town where opportunities were limited, Sarah spent months searching for employment. With a degree in hand and a wheelchair as her companion, she navigated the labyrinthine world of job applications with determination. Her résumé was polished and her cover letters tailored, yet every interview seemed to end at the doorstep. Employers commended her qualifications but cited "logistical concerns" or "lack of facilities" as reasons for her not fitting the role. Unspoken but palpable was the discomfort her disability elicited, a silent judgment that questioned her capabilities. Sarah's search for a job remained fruitless, a draining cycle of hope and rejection. Still, she persisted, believing that one day the right door would open.

Challenges Faced:

Lack of Understanding

Societal Stereotyping

Case Study 5: Glen—Accessibility and Employment

I have experienced a spectrum of interactions with others, encompassing both uplifting and challenging moments. My journey began with a childhood accident that left me with hemiplegia, a condition arising from brain damage or spinal cord injury, resulting in paralysis on one side of my body.

Alongside this, I also contend with breathing and voice disabilities. My resilience was tested during the four years I spent in the hospital, but from that adversity emerged a gifted individual. Despite my youthful years, I displayed advanced abilities, although my gait differed from the norm, and my voice carried a lower volume. Throughout my life, I have grappled with ableism, a pervasive force that has shaped my experiences. Nevertheless, I've consistently excelled and overachieved in all my endeavours.

Challenges Faced:

Employment Discrimination
Lack of Physical Accessibility in Workplaces
Societal Stereotyping

Case Study 6: Wayne—Home help

Wayne, a resident of Auckland who relies on a wheelchair for mobility, found himself in the position of advocating for fundamental home accessibility enhancements, including the installation of ramps and an accessible restroom. Wayne has been confined to bed rest for

over 15 years, with only occasional brief respite from his bed. As a paraplegic amputee with significant care requirements, Wayne possesses a strong desire to venture outside occasionally, although his outings are often marred by inadequate accessibility and a shortage of suitable parking options.

Challenges Faced:

Discrimination

Lack of Physical Accessibility in society

Societal Stereotyping

Case Study 7: Sally—Mental Health

Sally, a resident of Whangarei who relies on crutches for mobility, faced an unimaginable ordeal when she tragically lost her first child before the child reached the age of one month. This heart-wrenching experience was further exacerbated by the child's father, who unfairly blamed Sally for the loss, resulting in a violent confrontation that left Sally physically battered, leading to her hospitalization.

During her hospital stay, Sally's mental well-being suffered immensely. The traumatic sequence of events culminated in a cascade of misfortune, with Sally losing not only her firstborn but also her partner, her job, and her place of residence. Suddenly, Sally found herself thrust onto the streets, overwhelmed by desperation and isolation.
In her dire circumstances, Sally desperately needed support, yet regrettably, there was an alarming absence of available assistance.

Challenges Faced:

Financial ruin

Discrimination

Lack of Support

Societal Stereotyping

Chapter 10 enforced poverty

Beneficiaries earning abatement.

In New Zealand, WINZ (Work and Income New Zealand) provides financial support to individuals and families in need through various benefit programs. Earnings abatement is a term related to how beneficiaries' income from work can affect their eligibility for and the

amount of their benefit payments. Here are some details on beneficiaries' earnings abatement in the context of WINZ:

Earnings Abatement Threshold: WINZ sets a threshold for the amount of income a beneficiary can earn from employment before it affects their benefit payments. This threshold varies depending on the specific benefit and individual circumstances.

Types of Benefits: Different benefits provided by WINZ may have different rules regarding earnings abatement. Common types of benefits in New Zealand include the Unemployment Benefit, Sole Parent Support, and Supported Living Payment, among others.

Earnings Abatement Rates: When a beneficiary's earnings exceed the threshold, their benefit payments are reduced by a certain rate for each dollar earned above the threshold. These rates can also vary based on the type of benefit and the individual's circumstances.

Reporting Income: Beneficiaries are typically required to report their income to WINZ regularly. This reporting helps WINZ adjust their benefit payments based on the beneficiary's actual earnings.

Calculating Earnings Abatement: The specific calculation for earnings abatement depends on the benefit type and other factors. It's important for beneficiaries to understand how their earnings will affect their benefit payments and to report income accurately to WINZ.

Benefit Recipients: Earnings abatement rules apply to people who are receiving benefits and who also have some level of income from employment. The purpose of these rules is to ensure that people who can work and earning an income are encouraged to do so while still receiving some level of support.

Exemptions and Special Rules: There may be exemptions or special rules for certain groups of beneficiaries, such as those with disabilities or health conditions. These exemptions can affect how earnings are abated.

Work Incentives: The earnings abatement system is designed to provide incentives for beneficiaries to work and earn income without facing an immediate reduction in their benefit payments that equals their earnings.

It's essential for beneficiaries in New Zealand to familiarize themselves with the specific rules and thresholds that apply to their situation. WINZ provides guidance and resources to help beneficiaries understand how their earnings will affect their benefit payments. Keep in mind that my knowledge is based on information available up to September 2021, and there may have been changes or updates to WINZ policies and regulations since then. It's advisable to consult the official WINZ website or contact WINZ directly for the most up-to-date and accurate information regarding earnings abatement and other benefit-related matters.

Chapter 10 Conclusion

A summary of the various dimensions of marginalisation that disabled people face in New Zealand. This chapter also reiterates the urgent need for systemic changes to address these issues.

10. Conclusion

Marginalisation is a complex, multi-dimensional phenomenon that disproportionately impacts disabled people in New Zealand. This chapter has explored various dimensions that contribute to the marginalisation of disabled individuals, ranging from systemic barriers in healthcare and education to social stigmas and prejudices. The urgent need for systemic changes is evident if New Zealand aims to become a truly inclusive society.

Economic Marginalisation

The disabled community in New Zealand faces significant challenges in gaining employment and financial independence. Discrimination during hiring processes, lack of reasonable accommodations in the workplace, and inflexible work conditions create hurdles in achieving economic stability.

Healthcare Disparities

While healthcare services are generally accessible in New Zealand, the quality and availability of services for disabled people are often subpar. Lack of specialised care, long waiting periods, and limited geographic accessibility exacerbate the health disparities faced by this community.

Educational Barriers

The education system, although progressive in some respects, still fails to provide an equitable experience for disabled students. Inadequate facilities, lack of trained staff, and a curriculum that doesn't consider diverse learning needs all contribute to the educational marginalisation of disabled individuals.

Social Stigmatisation

Often rooted in ignorance or historical prejudices, cultural attitudes perpetuate stereotypes about disabled people. This manifests in multiple ways, from microaggressions and implicit biases to outright discrimination.

Accessibility Issues

From public transport to information technology, the absence of universal design practices results in inhospitable environments for disabled individuals. This leads to further isolation and curtails their participation in various facets of life.

Legal Framework

Although New Zealand has legislation aimed at protecting the rights of disabled people, the enforcement and effectiveness of these laws are often in question. Gaps in legislation and lax enforcement exacerbate the problems faced by the disabled community.

Urgent Need for Systemic Changes

The challenges faced by disabled people in New Zealand are not isolated issues but rather symptoms of systemic problems that require comprehensive solutions. Incremental changes may provide temporary relief but won't sufficiently address the root causes of marginalisation. What's needed are systemic overhauls that encompass policy reforms, cultural shifts, and a commitment from all sectors of society to work towards a more inclusive future.

In conclusion, the various dimensions of marginalisation intersect to create a life of compounded difficulties for disabled individuals in New Zealand. Only by acknowledging these intersections and implementing systemic changes can New Zealand progress toward a society that truly values the dignity, rights, and contributions of its disabled citizens.

Chapter 11 Recommendations

Suggested steps for policymakers, institutions, and the public to mitigate the marginalisation of disabled people in New Zealand, ranging from legal reforms to societal

initiatives.

Recommendations for Mitigating the Marginalisation of Disabled People in New Zealand

The marginalisation of disabled people is a complex and layered issue that calls for concerted efforts from all sectors of society to address. Below are some recommendations targeted at policymakers, institutions, and the public in New Zealand to help mitigate this marginalisation.

Policymakers

Legislative Reforms: Update existing laws related to disability rights to align them with international standards, like the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD).

Inclusive Education Policy: Enforce inclusive educational practices that not only accommodate disabled students but integrate them fully into mainstream schools.

Accessibility Standards: Develop and enforce universal design standards for public buildings, transportation, websites, and other services to ensure they are accessible to all, including disabled people.

Employment Initiatives: Implement policies to incentivise businesses to employ disabled people. This could include tax breaks or subsidies for companies that meet certain quotas.

Healthcare Access: Streamline the process for disabled people to access healthcare services, including specialised treatment and mental health support.

Data Collection: Invest in robust data collection to monitor the experiences of disabled people in various sectors, allowing for evidence-based policy decisions.

Social Welfare: Expand social welfare programs targeted at disabled people to ensure they have adequate financial support.

Public Awareness Campaigns: Fund public awareness campaigns aimed at reducing stigmatisation and discrimination against disabled people.

Institutions (Schools, Businesses, NGOs)

Diversity and Inclusion Training: Make diversity and inclusion training that includes a focus on disability issues mandatory for all employees.

Accessibility Audits: Conduct regular audits to ensure facilities and services are accessible to disabled people.

Affirmative Action: Implement affirmative action policies for the recruitment of disabled individuals.

Partnerships with NGOs: Collaborate with organisations focusing on disability advocacy to keep abreast of best practices for inclusion.

Resource Allocation: Allocate resources specifically for developing and implementing disability inclusion programs.

General Public

Education: Educate yourself and others about the struggles and experiences of disabled people to cultivate empathy and understanding.

Volunteer: Get involved with NGOs or community programs that aim to uplift disabled people.

Speak Up: Confront and challenge ableist language and behaviour when observed.

Support Disabled-Owned Businesses: Make a conscious effort to support businesses owned by or employed by disabled individuals.

Voting: Exercise your democratic right to vote for policymakers who prioritise the inclusion of disabled people in their agendas.
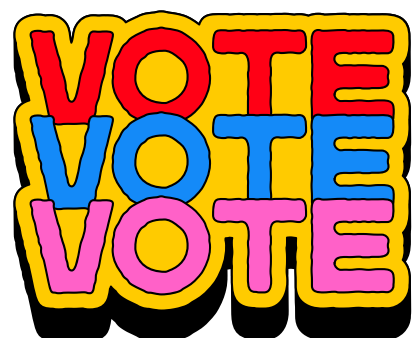
By implementing these recommendations, New Zealand can make significant strides in reducing the marginalisation of disabled people and fostering a more inclusive society.

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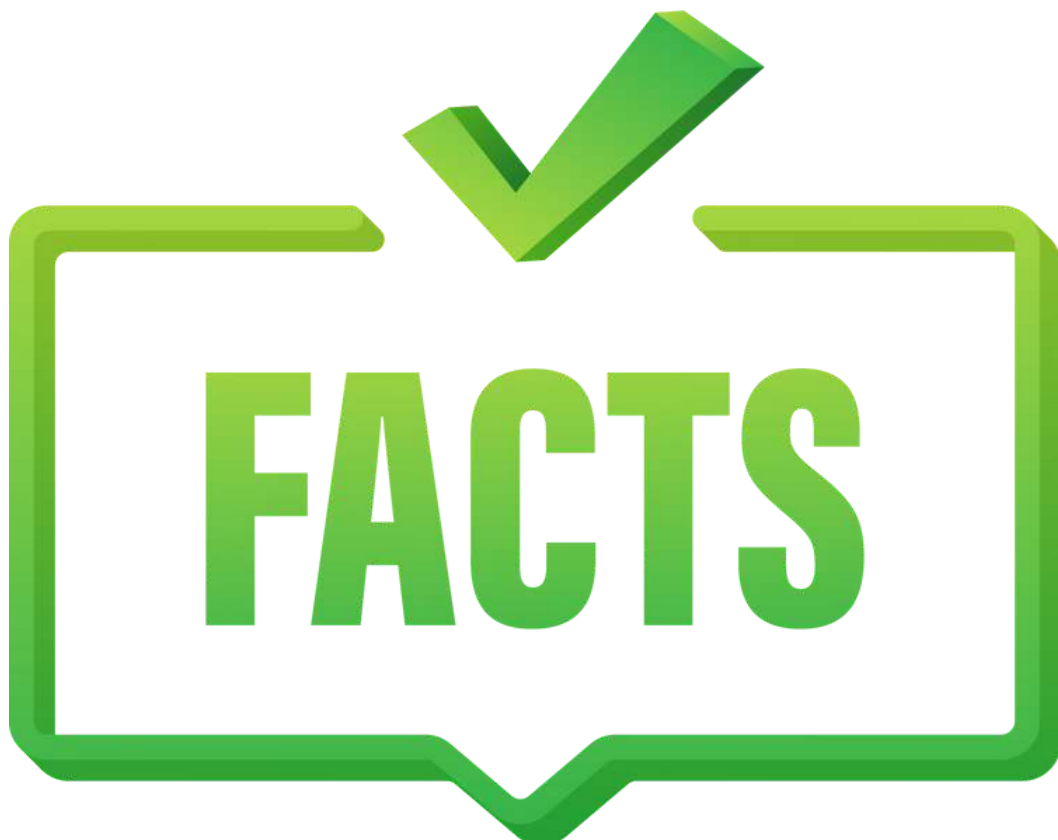
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Children with disability NZ

Children with Disability New Zealand is a petite organisation fueled by grand aspirations. At its helm stands our remarkable CEO, Glen McMillan, who once navigated the challenges of childhood disability. Glen's personal journey equips him with a unique insight into the trials faced by disabled children, their dedicated caregivers, and the broader community.

Our organisation was born from a fervent desire to make a difference, primarily through fundraising endeavours aimed at providing a wheelchair-accessible swing for a groundbreaking park development in Waipu, Northland. This endeavour was accomplished in collaboration with the Whangarei Council, resulting in a swing that is now enhancing the lives of those it was designed for.

Our charitable efforts are far from complete. Currently, we are passionately rallying support for the creation of a wheelchair-accessible seesaw at Raumanga Park in Whangarei, a project that holds great promise for further enriching the lives of disabled children.

At its core, our charity is a beacon of information sharing. It strives to bridge the knowledge gap surrounding the unique needs of disabled children, fostering improved understanding within society. Moreover, our mission is to cultivate awareness in a clear and easily digestible format, ensuring that the cause of disabled children resonates with hearts and minds across the nation.

Glen McMillan
CEO Children with Disability NZ
https://www.childrenwithdisability.co.nz/

Please consider donating By Direct Credit to our ASB.
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About the Author: Glen McMillan

Glen McMillan faced a life-altering event in his early years, an accident that led to a lengthy hospitalisation.

Emerging into the world at 14, after nearly four transformative years confined to a medical setting, he found himself with ground to cover and experiences to acquire. Fortunately, the rich tapestry of medical literature, seasoned professionals, and complex medical cases that filled his formative years provided him with an exceptional educational foundation.

Released over half a century ago, Glen's relentless quest for knowledge and self-improvement has never waned. Each day offers a new opportunity for growth, a principle he abides by with unwavering commitment. Now, as he turns a new chapter, Glen feels it's time to impart the wisdom and insights he has garnered over the years.

Disabled People and Marginalisation in New Zealand

A Comprehensive Analysis

An Effective Guide by Glen McMillan 2023

DISABILITY LEADERSHIP
— Moving Forward —

Authored by Glen McMillan
CEO Children with Disability NZ
https://www.childrenwithdisability.co.nz/