

At the Mighty steps to Academia

What foils the young disabled person?

Pathways to Tertiary Education

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Abstract

In 1998 the Ministry of Education introduced a funding programme for tertiary institutions, aimed at enhancing the institutions ability to remove the barriers that prevent students with disabilities undertaking and succeeding at tertiary study, called the Special Supplementary Grant. Institutions like Victoria University of Wellington utilise this funding to provide personal support, academic arrangements and physical accommodations for students enrolled at the University.

In 2003 18,335 students enrolled at Victoria University of Wellington, of this 590 identified as having a disability (3.2%).

In this research we aimed to investigate whether, within the age range of 17 to 25 year olds who are academically appropriate for tertiary education, young people with impairments are underrepresented within the catchment area for Victoria University of Wellington.

We also explore:

- Factors that influence a young person with impairments' decision to undertake tertiary education.
- The current transition process in New Zealand compared with what is happening overseas.
- Several case studies that can highlight what is available at tertiary institutions and the process students took to get there.

In our conclusion we will identify possible areas that could benefit from change and present suggestions based on our findings and comparisons, with the goal of increasing participation by young people with impairments in tertiary education.

Methodology

When we began this research we had several goals in mind. The first was to gain statistics from which we could get an indication of the representation of people with impairments in High School and on into the 1st Year of Tertiary

Education. The second was to investigate the influences on young people with impairments' decisions, post-secondary school, from the students' perspective. Thirdly was to explore the transition process in New Zealand and compare, if possible, with what is happening elsewhere. Finally we hoped to make suggestions for areas of improvement, based on what we gained from our previous goals, with a particular focus on what more we as a tertiary provider could do to assist the process of transition for young people with impairments.

In order to accomplish these goals we formulated our action plan for carrying out this research.

First we would endeavour to gain national statistical information on disability within the 17 to 25 year age range from Statistics NZ.

Second we would endeavour to gain statistical information from the local Wellington catchment schools via a short questionnaire we would construct with the help of a colleague from one of the schools.

Third we would gain statistical information from our own university and then on to the other tertiary providers within our catchment area.

From these three steps we hoped to get useful data from which we could gain a rough first impression of the representation of young people with impairments within our local secondary environment, then make comparisons with the representation within tertiary in the same catchment, and then with the national data.

Fourth we would ask our local catchment schools if they could approach their people with impairments nearing final year to see if any would be willing to talk to us and answer a few short questions around transition. We would then contact and interview the students.

Fifth we would interview a cross section of our own population of young people with impairments and ask the same questions.

Sixth we would select a few students to interview with a more in-depth set of questions surrounding their experience.

From these three steps we hoped to gain information on the student's impressions of the transition process they are experiencing or have recently experienced and what factors influenced or are influencing their post-secondary destination, whatever that may be.

Seventh we would contact the Ministry of Education Group Special Education and other involved community agencies, such as Emerge, and find out about the process for transition within New Zealand.

Eighth we would research online for information about transition within other countries.

From these two steps we would gain an idea of what the process is, and be able to compare it with what other countries are doing. And then with input from the previous three steps we would be able to make comparisons with

what the process is supposed to be in NZ and what the students actually experience.

Ninth we will collate all the information to consider what our University could do more of in the process of transition for young people with impairments.

So what happened to the statistics?

In 2001 Statistics New Zealand conducted the Disability Counts 2001 Census. From the data collected we gained the often-quoted statistic '1 in 5' people in New Zealand identify as having a disability. It was also found that 39% of disabled adults had no educational qualification at all, 34% of disabled people's highest qualification was from secondary school, and only 27% of disabled people had a post-secondary qualification. This is compared to 24%, 42%, and 34% respectively for non-disabled people.

In 2001 the participation rate in tertiary education for disabled people was estimated at 2.3%, where as the rate of participation by non-disabled people was estimated at 16.7%. There appears to be a very clear indication of under-representation.

Our original goal for this section of our research was to gather our own statistics that we could use to get an indication of the representation of young people with impairments within the Wellington catchment secondary schools and to compare it with the representation within the Wellington catchment tertiary providers as a rough indication of our local situation.

What originally seemed to be a fairly straightforward task, turned out to be quite the opposite.

As stated in our methodology we sent a short survey to the 46 catchment schools asking for numbers of students, disabled and not who attended the school in 2003, were senior students and had the academic potential for tertiary education.

We received 11 responses of which 4 contained usable data, the rest were apologies for being unable to help for a variety of reasons, and one of note was not quite so polite. We did not receive enough data to even begin on our first goal.

Several things surprised us while reviewing the responses; the first was the oft-stated inability to gain several of the stats, the second was the 4 schools who did respond omitted (and stated so) the numbers of students in their Special Education Units, the third was the significantly low response rate.

We have now come to understand that, as of this time, there are a vast range of different systems being utilised by secondary schools in compiling their twice

yearly roll returns (many different computer programs and some schools still using paper files), and that the majority do not meet the validation standards established by the Ministry of Education. This goes some way to answering our question of why some schools were unable to gain the statistics for our survey.

We also learnt a great deal about the vastly different funding schemes between schools and tertiary, and along with that a vastly different reporting mechanism. Such as, in the tertiary report to the TEC on our Special Supplementary Grant we include a section on the number of students with disabilities and a breakdown by type of impairment in 10 categories, where as schools do not store disability information by type of impairment but by specific need.

We could not find suitable stats using the online facilities provided by Statistics New Zealand and our direct requests for statistics have gone unanswered still.

The requests for statistics from our own institution took a matter of days to be answered in full.

As we decided, due to the responses from schools, not to pursue this goal any further we did not contact other tertiary providers within the Wellington region.

What is the transition process in New Zealand?

We looked at the process of transition in New Zealand from two angles; one was what students were actually experiencing, and two was what the Ministry of Education's outline of what should be happening.

So from the students experience here is what we found out.

Most of the students we interviewed identified a process of transition in their senior years of school. The most common experiences were: attending tertiary provider's open days; attending career expos at school; listening to inspirational outside speakers and recruitment agents from tertiary institutions talk; seeking advise from careers specialists within their schools and guidance from teachers in the forms of subject planning and recommendations based on academic abilities. Most said these experiences were what everyone had received in their schools, it had been a 'one size fits all' approach, rather than something tailored specifically to them because of their disability.

Some students were able to describe a more tailored approach to their transition planning. These included support from specialists like Physiotherapists, Occupational Therapists and Psychologists, who worked alongside the student ensuring the disability needs would be catered for within the pathway they chose. One student had been working with an out of school agency on work experience. Only two students described having Individual

Education Programmes (IEPs) and the difference between their experiences is worth mentioning. One student recalled having IEPs regularly throughout their schooling; the meetings were opportunities to problem solve all the possible issues of studying with a disability. This meant the student could concentrate on their academic goals rather than worry about every day issues. This student was an integral part of this process and expected it to be a very useful tool with transition planning. In contrast another student who had IEPs was never invited to a meeting nor saw what was planned from them, even though there were 2 meetings a year whilst they were a school student. Subsequently this student is unsure of where to go or what to do now that they have finished school.

To give us an idea of what is meant to happen we first searched the Internet for information. However searching under key words like transition planning and processes did not prove as fruitful as we had hoped. It seems that in New Zealand, at the moment, the most useful guidelines for a transition process come from the Ministry of Education's website. Though, it was interesting to discover that even on this website references to 'transition' were not in the form of a process itself but as an outcome of Individual Educational Programmes.

The Ministry's website recommends that students with special educational needs should have an IEP if they require extra assistance, adapted programmes or learning environments, specialised equipment or materials to support them in special or regular education settings. This process creates a living document that is regularly reviewed with these key people, the student, parents, teachers, and specialists. The guidelines state that the process is a means to eliminate the potential learning barriers that cannot be overcome with ordinary classroom strategies, identify when more support is needed than the classroom can provide, plan and facilitate any major changes in the students life like transition points, for example leaving school.

From a layman's perspective this website was really informative and a good starting point for establishing a transition process for students with disabilities. However it did not seem strong enough, the information is given as guidelines or recommendations rather than the objectives a school should be meeting for a student.

We learnt from our investigation that transition processes are happening, but not in a standardised way. A therapist who works mainly with ORRS (Ongoing and Reviewable Resourcing Schemes) students shared with us a transition profile and process they use to plan what the students would like to work towards after school. This profile includes the student's IEP transition goals as well as their strengths and needs/accommodations in the educational and vocational setting; it also records the student's self-advocacy and work readiness skills. The profile can be reviewed throughout the process, allowing for change that may come from work with a therapist. The process is depicted in a flow diagram that clearly identifies for the student what is to be expected

when planning for transition. The student is at the centre of the process with other people feeding into the planning, the diagram highlights that the student's views, preferences and interests are important parts of developing a workable transition plan. These documents seemed like really useful resources being used by one individual, our source explained it would be wishful thinking to believe this type of work is happening everywhere, but they did hint that things had started to improve and with transition planning getting a higher profile there was hope it would become a more standardised process across New Zealand in time.

Another insight into what is happening was from an agency, based in the community, working with secondary school students 1 to 1 on their transition planning, Emerge Supportive Employment. Their approach includes career planning, which encourages the student to think about their dreams and goals, skills and strengths and the possible support they will need once they leave school. Emerge then creates work experience placements for the student. While the student is engaged in this part of the process they are also working on the skills needed to get about independently in their community, catching buses for example. As mentioned earlier one student we interviewed worked with Emerge, they felt it was really worthwhile because they gained confidence and motivation to pursue further study in this area to improve their chances of employment later on. The student also went to visit tertiary institutions with Emerge as part of their transition planning.

Emerge don't just start the transition process; they see it through to the end of a student's time at secondary school. They provide feedback to schools on areas that the student could develop skills in, which would assist their transition. They also make the necessary support links with other agencies once the student has completed secondary school, this may be with services within a tertiary environment or an employment consultant who carries on supporting the young person.

Lastly from a tertiary perspective there are some options offered to students in the Wellington region that we consider being part of the transition process. For those students who do not meet University entry requirements upon leaving secondary school they may enrol in the Certificate of University Proficiency Programme. Upon completion of this certificate they will have met the requirements to continue on with University study. Other tertiary level providers, such as WelTec and Whitireia, hold life skills and bridging courses for students who want to gain confidence and further educational skills once they have finished school.

How does it stack up?

The process, which the Ministry of Education outlines, is virtually the same as that used in several other countries. The biggest difference we have found is the amount of information available to parents, students, and schools regarding

the processes and responsibilities of those involved. For example, the state of Wisconsin in the USA has a vast array of online resources for use in establishing an IEP for a student, including guides for timelines of events.

What are the influences?

Aside from whatever process of transition students' experienced we were also interested in, from their perspective, what were the biggest factors that influenced their decision to pursue tertiary education. These results are summarised below as the positive and negative influences ranked in order of greatest impact:

Positive influences

- Parents attitude and support (13)
- Own ambition and drive (9)
- Family other than parents (7)
- Peer group attitude and support (6)
- The attitudes and support of teachers and teacher aides (5)
- The perceived expectations of the home socioeconomic environment (2)
- The attitudes and support of the specialists working with the students, e.g. OT's, Physiotherapists and Psychologists (2)
- Having a strong will (2)
- Knowledge of available funding (1)
- Previous exposure to a tertiary environment (1)
- Knowledge of service provision in the tertiary environment (1)

Negative influences:

- Teachers attitudes and level of support (12)
- Attitude and beliefs around disability in general (7)
- Attitude of peer group (4)
- Own perceived disability needs (3)
- Family attitudes(1)
- Segregated disability environment in school (1)

It was not surprising to discover that parental attitude and support was the highest ranked positive influence on the student's decision to pursue tertiary education. We would conjecture that the influence of parents would also be rated at the top for non-disabled students.

The students' family and social influences, for example their peer group, all out ranked the influences from the students' educators and any specialist involvement like Group Special Education. This demonstrates the importance of the influence that a peer group's drive and ambition has on a disabled student's

own ambition and emphasises the need for students to have role models within their peer groups, disabled and non disabled.

It was interesting to hear from many of the students we interviewed a commonality of wanting to disprove people's judgements and concerns about their abilities to actually take on and achieve in a tertiary environment. This indicates that many of the students we spoke to had a strong belief in themselves to take on a challenging new environment and faith that the services available would offer the support needed for them to be successful.

Having awareness of what services were available at tertiary institutions and what funding options could be accessed were also mentioned as positive influencing factors. Some students recalled having meetings with Disability Support Services and academic staff when they visited tertiary institutions during open days. One student recalled that learning there was free doctor services at University really helped them to decide to go because it took away the anxieties around managing their medical needs in a new environment.

The number one negative influence our student interviewees reported was the level of support and attitudes of their teachers. In most cases the negative impact was not the direct discouragement of the student but more so the apathy received during the student's process of transition. This is alarming as teachers play a major role in preparing the student for life after school.

The second most acknowledged negative influence was the general attitudes and beliefs around disability. During our research we often heard, from various sources involved in the disability community, that some disabled students were considered 'too disabled' to do further education after school, and that the ones who do go on to tertiary education are the 'able-disabled'. So what does this mean for the student? Does this lead the student to question their aims and expectations? How and when do the significant people in a young person's life decide this for them?

It can be a challenge in some cases to accommodate for the support that a disabled student may need to function and achieve in our educational system. Is it that the harder it is to accommodate the more likely it is that the student is placed in the 'too-hard' basket?

One of the students we interviewed mentioned the segregated disability environment in their school as being a negative influence. They experienced a mainstream education whilst utilising resources from their schools Special Unit, they described the environment within the Special Unit as being very controlled, almost institutional, and this discouraged the student from using the Special Unit resources unless absolutely necessary.

Case studies

Student A

Spina Bifida; uses a wheelchair; studied at Victoria University of Wellington for 4 years; now working as a tutor and planning to do PhD in 2005.

Student attended University straight from school at 18 years.

Their experience of a transition process:

- attended open days, career expos
- stayed in University hostel
- through own efforts sought out advice from Careers adviser to check for study options and accessibility
- needed to be proactive to get support, had to do own research on options

Positive influences:

- own attitude about making something for themselves as knew with their disability they had to make the most of their academic skills even though at school they did not enjoy studying
- parental support and encouragement
- when considering studying options the student liked the diversity offered by tertiary study compared to school

Negative influences:

- the attitudes of some University representatives, for example one person discouraged attendance due to accessibility issues
- own anxieties and fears about leaving home, concerned how they would cope with flatting, being independent, living with strangers who did not share their experience
- but knowing they had no other options helped the student turn this negative into a positive to succeed

Differences noticed in attending school and University:

- at University the support is more than just disability related, it encompassed social, academic and economic needs
- much more freedom to be an individual at University
- expands your mind, all students need to be more independent and this was especially important for this student, needed to be more positive, have an open mind and ask for support when its needed
- school was a comfort zone because it was more structured and familiar

Differences in the support at University compared to school:

- at school the only disability support received was from a Teacher Aide, the student often felt out of the loop with their planning for their needs, decisions were made for the student
- at University the support is specialised, it encouraged the student to be more independent and allowed them to facilitate the problem solving to meet their needs

Examples of support from School:

- teacher aide through out school, this was subject related so when the student could not get to the computer suite for example because of accessibility issues, the teacher aide became their tutor, or because the school could not adapt activities for this student in PE the teacher aide did it with them

Examples of support from University:

- accessible accommodation, hostel and flats
- provision for exams of using a writer when student had temporary impairment of a broken hand
- mobility van around the hilly campus
- guidance around career choice
- advocacy around access issues having, venues changed to accommodate the student
- opportunity to be involved in committees around the campus, involved in consultation getting to play a part in the University providing for other students who need support.

Student B

Student with Asperger's Syndrome; studied at Victoria University of Wellington for 4 years; just completed work experience and plans to undertake further tertiary study.

Student attended University straight from school at 18 years.

Their experience of a transition process:

- regular IEP meetings, planning for post-secondary wasn't integrated into process until in 6th form year (year12)
- timetable for 7th form year (year 13) was modelled on a university timetable as a result of IEP planning
- as a result of the transition planning the student felt better prepared for the way University is structured
- approached DSS at University of choice with parent prior to commencement of study

Positive influences:

- The support and encouragement of a wide support base, including parents, family, peers, and teachers.
- Tertiary education was the best option for developing the skills the student had

Negative influences:

- own anxieties about meeting the academic entry requirements for the tertiary institution
- own uncertainties surrounding the change from secondary to tertiary education

Differences noticed in attending school and University:

- Academically the student noticed little change from 7th Form secondary to 1st year tertiary education due to the transition planning received during 7th Form
- Socially the student noticed a huge difference. At University there was a greater level of maturity displayed and the hustle and bustle of a greater number of students. It often felt like being in an airport terminal

Differences in the support at University compared to school:

- In school the support received was always reactive; developing systems to meet the needs only once they arose; there was little experience in problem-solving
- At University the support systems were well established due to the large experience pool the University's Disability Support Services already had; the support was proactive and flowed more smoothly; any issues that arose were dealt with faster; there was a larger variety of supports available

Examples of support from School:

- teacher aide through out school
- technology support for their AlphaSmart notetaker

Examples of support from University:

- special exam facilities
- use of a reader/writer during tests
- a notetaker during lectures
- technology support from the Adaptive Technology and IT Adviser
- a mentor to help keep the student on track with timelines and study
- had access to rest & study rooms for students with disabilities

Student C

Cerebral Palsy; uses a wheelchair; has communication and personal care needs; studied at Victoria University of Wellington for 4 years; now works as software programmer.

Attended University from school at the age of 19.

Their experience of a transition process:

- at school had lots of specialist's input from OT's and teachers to helped the student think about what types of options were available to them
- teachers provided the academic options and OT the practical options, for example accommodation and generally how to get things done independently
- in 7th form there was a transition class for all students interested in tertiary options

Positive influences:

- Having the transition process happen early, from the age of 16, this gave the student time to compare different options and make an informed choice after checking out different providers for themselves
- Meeting lecturers who presented facilitated the student to think about how they could participate fully
- Involvement with DSS staff who encouraged the student to think independently
- Own ambitions, from a young age the student always said they would attend University and the lecturers and DSS staff helped the student to make it a reality
- Also had success lobbying government to increase hours for support in Wellington region, which made leaving home possible

Negative influences:

- Absolutely no one believed this student could leave home and attend University at the same time
- A teacher gave the wrong subject advice, which left the student choosing that was not best suited to their career pathway
- At school the student did not experience a lot of social interaction and it was not a skill that was addressed for them prior to leaving, so the thought of living with new people caused huge anxieties for the student

Differences noticed in attending school and University:

- High school more structured for everyone, student found themselves taking less courses because this was generally acceptable, compared with school being stricter of course levels
- University is all about the individual taking responsibility

Differences in the support at University compared to school:

- At school the support was intense and they had a lot of specialists involved, student did not feel like there was much room for personal choice and control, for example the student could not wag a class as where would they have gone to without being missed
- At University the support was separated into what was needed academically and what was needed personally, and different groups of people did it and the student had more control over the situation

Examples of support from school:

- 24/7 specialists input
- adaptative technology like computer and voice synthesiser to communicate with
- teacher aides who wrote for the student

Examples of support from University:

- Got a personal computer
- Writers for exams and extra time
- A group of Asian students formed a network for note taking and included the student on their distribution list
- Volunteer notes from other students in different courses
- Lecturer's notes, OHP's
- Allowed to tape record lectures and tutorials so the student could transcribe them later
- Had control over personal assistants that were paid for by a government provider,
- Lived in an accessible hostel and University flats whilst studying

Conclusion

In our conclusion we will make statements and pose questions based on what we have discovered through our research. We are disregarding the logistics of any of the questions we pose or suggestions we make.

It is surprisingly difficult to gain useful statistical data to base any form of conjecture regarding population and representation of disabled students in pre-tertiary schooling due to the manner in which the schools record this information, or don't as the case may be. Whilst it is easier to gain statistical data from tertiary institutions due to the method we are required to record it in, and you can get an indication of the representation here, and can make comparisons with the national census 2001 data, you gain little insight as to the mechanism for this representation due to the lack of data from the feeding ground of tertiary institutions, the schools.

The Ministry of Education's Student Management System Strategy 2004-2008, plans to encourage the improvement and uptake of accredited SMS by schools, this should go a step in the right direction for ensuring schools can provide statistics in an easy to follow, timely, and consistent manner. This would still not address the inconsistency in the way schools record disability information as compared to the way tertiary institutions are required to. Should there be consistency in the recording and reporting between pre-tertiary and tertiary in this regard?

All students experience some form of transition process in their final year of secondary school, however the amount, content, and delivery of this process varies widely across the sector with an apparent lack of consistency and ability to accommodate different needs. Should the process of transitioning from secondary to post-secondary become a more formal process that follows standards throughout New Zealand, built in flexibility and a reporting method to allow for accountability? In a process without standards and in a system where need far out weighs the amount of support available, how can we be sure all young people with impairments are catered for?

There is a marked difference in the reporting responsibilities between schools and the tertiary sector. In tertiary education our special supplementary grant funding is directly tied to a thorough reporting mechanism that allows for absolute accountability for what and where funding is spent. Within the school sector, apart from the top 3% of young people with impairments whose funding is directly administered by Group Special Education, there appears to be little reporting on the funding granted to and administered by the schools themselves. Why is it that the tertiary disability sector lobbied for full accountability in its reporting where as there appears to be no comparison within the school sector?

We would like to reflect on some of the positive influences in our final section on what more Victoria University of Wellington can do. However, there is one thought that came from the positive influences we would like to highlight. The students we spoke to demonstrate a strong belief in themselves. It left us thinking that further exploration should be made into how disabled people acquire these positive attitudes as perhaps this could be a beneficial awareness, teachers and specialists who work with disabled people, should have to ensure they are supporting students to grow into self assured young adults as this clearly is a influencing factor for students to chose tertiary education as an option for after school.

There are several points worth musing over about the negative influences; one is to consider the group of students we had access to, ones from our population who have already made the transition and the school students who are currently going through the process. From our perspective it would have been interesting to talk to some students who were not confident about their post secondary destination. As the number one negative influencing factor from our research group was their teachers' level of support and attitude so it would be

illuminating to see whether this factor might be holding back other students we did not get the opportunity to speak to.

The second is the apparent attitudinal barriers our research participants chose to disclose as negative influences, like advice to go to an 'easier' tertiary institution than University or no one believing that they could make leaving home and attending University a reality. These are examples of the types of messages young people with impairments are getting from the significant others in their lives, parents, family, teachers, and peers, during their processes of transition. The students we spoke to battled on in the face of these attitudes; it leaves you wondering about the students for whom these attitudes are enough to deter them from choosing tertiary. At our University, advocacy is an important role of Disability Support Services as we strongly challenge any person who holds and tries to exert an attitudinal barrier about a disabled student being part of our institution. Who plays the role of advocate for the pre-tertiary students who hear from their school, family, and peers that they shouldn't be going onto tertiary education because they are disabled?

After undertaking this project, through the disappointment and frustrations, we can say it has been an interesting learning experience. The highs of this project were speaking to young people with impairments about their goals and ambitions and heartening to realise they have pursued their dreams in the face of some adversity. Talking with others in the sector that support the process of transition confirmed for us that great things are happening in pockets, they are yet to meet our high expectations of what is ideal across the sector, but many individuals are working hard to develop systems.

The lows were finding out how difficult it was to get statistics and the reluctance we felt from schools in this regard.

It seems we have definitely entered this process during a period of change and we were reminded that things are much better than they ever have been. Lets hope, with initiatives like the current government project to identify processes for transition through supportive employment agencies, we can expect a more accountable and transparent system in the future.

Our final aim in finishing this research was to identify objectives we could present to our University; things that we could initiate that would make a difference to a young person with impairments' choice to undertake tertiary education.

Objectives:

- Further develop the resource that is sent to schools for recruitment purposes, to include more information relevant to disabled students; success stories, examples of various needs being met in the tertiary environment and what options are available to them.
- Develop whanau days where parents of disabled students of all ages are invited to experience first hand what a tertiary provider like ours can offer their child, again sharing success stories and demonstrating the level of support available and the lifestyle expected of a University. (Victoria University of Wellington has a parents evening in November, but we feel this is too late for many of the parents we would want to target.)
- We have heard that Career Advisers don't work with the students in some school special units or ORRS students. We need to find out who does their career advising and then include them in the meeting of Career Advisers at University during Open Day when they are informed of what is available.
- Develop a resource of student's success stories and experiences to be used in publications and school recruitment information to encourage other young people with impairments to undertake tertiary education.
- Raising the profile of how accessible tertiary study is at Victoria University of Wellington, by talking at events, being involved in expos, attending meetings in the sector to encourage those who work with young people with impairments to think that tertiary is an option but it needs to be thought about early in the young persons education.

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Appendix A: Whanau evening overview

Aim:

Provide an opportunity for young people with impairments and their families can hear current students of Victoria University share their experience of transitioning to and studying at a tertiary institution, the experience of some parents of students with impairments, as well as meeting staff who are involved in supporting students with impairments, getting a chance to see some of the adaptive technology available and learning about the sources of funding to help in their post-secondary pursuits.

How the Whanau evening was organised:

- Invites to the evening were sent out to our community networks, e.g.: Local Visual Resource Centre, CSS and Parent to Parent Wellington. We felt this was the best way to reach families and would help to have the community networks make a positive plug about the evening.
- Several students were approached to be part of the panel. They were chosen to reflect a cross section of impairments.
- The panels were provided with questions to answer that had be devised to cover a range of information, for example making the transition to tertiary study, support received while studying, what opportunities were gained from being at University and what parents needed to know.
- An Information Pack for Victoria was created for the guests to take away. It covered funding sources (loans, allowances and grants), accommodation, the important dates and some information about the social aspects of Victoria and Wellington.

Feedback quotes from participants:

"The information pack was really useful to take away"

"Especially interested to talk about IT technology"

"Student centred by having the inclusion of student and parents on the panel"

"Testimonies were very much enriching and informative"

"Learning about DSS and the support available at university made us feel much better as we need to plan our son's transition to tertiary education."

"The students speaking gained confidence talking about their experiences"

"Not dominated by professionals"

"Inviting students as young as 11 meant we were sowing the seeds early in their transition planning."

"Turning point for one family who didn't realise this support was available and so far their school experience had not been helpful"