



Summary of Todd Foundation Disabilities Learning Circle

Held Monday November 26 2007

1 Background

This document records the key findings from a 'learning circle' convened by the Todd Foundation. Attendees were grantees working with people experiencing disabilities and a second funder, the Community Trust of Southland. The objectives were to share learnings and to provide advice on future funding.

2 How can funders help?

2.1 Goals for Funding

A possible goal for funders to consider is:

Children and families / whanau who currently experience disability have the opportunity to **pursue a good life**.

This may include supporting initiatives that:

- Create an environment of **true inclusion**, where the 'functional diversity' of all people is understood and valued so that people with 'unique function' participate and contribute fully
- **Encourage high expectations** to enable children experiencing disabilities to develop their full potential.
- **Build connections** and supportive networks around children experiencing disabilities and their families / whanau.
- Develop **effective partnerships** so children experiencing disabilities and their family/whanau can experience effective and responsive support processes and services"

2.2 Practical suggestions for funders

- Keep asking questions
- Read "the answer to how is yes: acting on what matters" by Peter Block
- Ask "who is this good for"? (Eg if the initiative is benefiting non-disabled people more than disabled people then it's probably not the best choice.)
- Decide what future we want to create and fund for the long term
- Don't be afraid to make suggestions to applicants, eg encouraging collaboration and strategic thinking
- Take at least one risk each funding round.
- If working with new organisations, help them find a mentor

- Run workshops like this across different funding streams
- If in doubt, invest in the “who”.

3 What are we learning?

Participants were asked to share their mistakes and what they learned: here are some of the key learnings, classified by where the learning can be applied:

3.1 *Our attitudes:*

- Be bold! You don’t need all your ducks in a row before you start something. Just try things out, even if you haven’t yet got funding, even if you don’t know whether they will work
- Be thoughtful about what might compromise your integrity. (Eg watch out for government funding with too many strings attached.)
- Own our vision and passion - and stick with it over time
- To do great things we need the time to think about great things - and to listen, share and test our thinking

3.2 *Our organisation*

- When setting up your board, personal commitment and passion is more important than ‘skills’ (law, accounting etc) because you can buy in skills if necessary

3.3 *Our initiatives*

- Provide lots of support and training to volunteers to keep them connected and involved and ensure that the volunteering works for them
- Provide support to a family before education. This is because a family in stress shuts down and can’t learn
- Don’t be too prescriptive, be flexible and open to change

3.4 *Our funding*

- Work closely with the organisations we fund, before and after the grant is made
- Recognise what kind of funding is government’s responsibility, but sometimes just do it anyway if government doesn’t seem to be taking on that responsibility.
- Identify key needs and effective remedies

4 Disabilities in NZ: Where have we come from?

Participants identified the following timeline of significant events have shaped the lives of disabled people and their families in Aotearoa NZ.

- 1970s**
 - ACC introduced
 - Social Role Valorisation developed. (This is a model that predicts ‘people who differ in any way from societal expectations or desirability, where this difference is negatively valued, will be badly treated by that society, [and is] designed to address the social and psychological wounds that get inflicted on vulnerable people because they are devalued’¹)
 - ACC act 1974
- 1980s**
 - Hospitals closed and people moved into the community
- 1990s**
 - 1992 Health Reforms. This had a negative impact because a medical rather than social model was used to address disabilities
 - American ADA 1991
 - Human Rights Act 1993
- 2000s**
 - Inclusive education introduced in 2000
 - NZ disability strategy released 2001
 - Pathways to inclusion 2002
 - “An ordinary life” 2003
 - Sign language become official language of NZ 2006
 - UN Convention signed 2007. However the workshop noted that while the rhetoric from government about inclusion had been generally good over the last few years, there was a huge gap between the rhetoric and the reality. Participants stated that people experiencing disabilities are generally still limited by societal attitudes and the contracted services that happen to be offered, rather than controlling their destiny.

5 Disabilities in NZ: Where do we want to go to?

Participants identified the following aims for the future for disabled people and their families:

- An acknowledgement that one size doesn’t fit all
- Global recognition of the concept of ‘functional diversity’ (ie being disabled is simply another form of diversity - some of us have brown eyes, some have blue, some have brown skins, some are disabled...)
- Families are supported and empowered early. There should be unrestricted support in all areas and any way, and families should have authority over their lives
- Mindsets change so that expectations for families are raised
- The funding should follow the individual
- No-one is alone or isolated

¹ wikipedia

- Everyone has education and awareness of disabilities – eg more disabled teachers
- Disabled people have more opportunity to build their asset base
- Disestablishment of the provider system – or making it a default option when a more proactive approach can't be attained.

6 Funder's journey: Where have we come from and where are we heading?

- 1970's**
 - Todd Foundation established – 'scattergun' funding
- 1980s**
 - Community Trust of Southland established – broad health and social sector funding
- 2000 - 2007**
 - Todd Foundation moves to fewer, bigger grants and selects children experiencing disabilities as one focus area
 - Both Community Trust of Southland and Todd Foundation move to providing multi-year grants where appropriate
- The future**
 - Grant-making better informed by the community
 - More collaboration between projects, community organisations, and funders
 - Better feedback loops – funders and community organisations working together to try things, learn from them and try new things integrating the learning

7 Appendix 1: Workshop Attendees

- Audrey Buel, Standards and Monitoring Service
- Philip Paxton, Diversityworks
- Lorna Sullivan, Standards Plus
- Anne Wilkinson, Parent to Parent
- Robyn Koehler, Community Trust of Southland
- John Todd, Todd Foundation
- Kate Frykberg, Todd Foundation

Apologies:

- Susan Foster-Cohen, The Champion Centre
- Wainui Bedford, the Todd Foundation