

disability connect.

Impact Report

July 2025 - June 2026

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Front cover image description: A busy hall at Transition Expo 2025, seen from above. People move between rows of stalls and banners, stopping to talk with stallholders.

Right image description: Morgen stands on a platform high up on the boat's mast, smiling at the camera above her. She is wearing a safety harness and is holding on to a rope ladder beside her.



About Disability Connect

Disability Connect is a Disability Information Advisory Service (DIAS) serving greater Auckland, with a national footprint.

We're a lived-experience organisation, with more than 80 percent of staff either living with disability or raising disabled children. This grounds our support in real life, not theory.

We embed Enabling Good Lives principles across all services, helping disabled people and families identify strengths, explore flexible options, and make informed decisions.

Our work builds capability, confidence, and connection so families can navigate systems clearly.

We stand beside whānau with empathy, practical guidance, and a belief in strong, inclusive communities.

Our vision	That disabled people and their families are able to lead the lives they want.
Our mission	To lead and influence positive change for disabled people and their families by providing trusted information, advocacy, and support grounded in lived experience.
Our values	To respect and support choice.



Image description: Thirteen Disability Connect team members wave or make heart and peace signs in front of a large banner. Zsuzsa sits holding her dog, next to Mike in his wheelchair.

Foreword

Disability Connect continues to demonstrate what genuine leadership and meaningful support can look like for disabled people and whānau.

As a parent of two disabled young adults, I know personally how challenging it can be to navigate systems that are often complex, fragmented and slow to respond. Having trusted organisations that understand those challenges, listen to lived experience and provide practical support can make an enormous difference.

What stands out to me is how committed Disability Connect is to working alongside disabled people and families, helping them navigate challenges, advocate for what they need, and have their voices heard. From housing and information to advocacy and connection, it's all grounded in what people face daily.

As demand grows, organisations like theirs are more important than ever. Their work strengthens not only individuals and families, but our wider communities, helping create a society where disabled people have greater choice, opportunity and control over their lives.

It's a privilege to support and acknowledge their important work.

Ngā mihi nui,
Ed Collett
Air New Zealand Enable Network

Over the last year, significant changes to government policy have directly impacted New Zealand's disability community.

This is on top of general policy and global changes, adding to the challenges our community already face. It's tough out there.

Our Board is proud of the Disability Connect team, who consistently provide authentic and professional support to many families.

At a time when the pace of change is confronting and bewildering, our team are there to advocate, support, and connect those who feel abandoned and ignored.

We remain committed to standing with our community and speaking up when it matters, so disabled people and their families don't face these challenges alone.

Ngā mihi nui,
Colleen Brown, KSO
Board Chair - Disability Connect





Image descriptions:
Left - Ed Collett. Right - Colleen Brown

Celebrating Our Success

This year, we were honoured to be recognised by our peers through the Federation of Disability Information Centre's National Awards.

This reflects not only the quality of our work, but our heart, lived experience, commitment to disabled people and their families, and determination to lead positive change across New Zealand.

The Member of the Year Award affirmed our strong governance, high-quality DIAS delivery, cultural responsiveness, national advocacy, and leadership in housing, transition, pastoral care, and community engagement.

The Communication Award recognised our accessible, culturally grounded communication, including newsletters, social media reach, community-driven initiatives, and sector presentations.

The Academy Award for Training acknowledged our commitment to continuous learning, with 17 team members enrolled in the Building Inclusive Communities qualification.

Together, these awards reflect our values: leading change, strengthening community capability, building inclusive practice, and investing in people.

We were also honoured to be the inaugural recipient of the Auckland Down Syndrome Association's Support Organisation Award, recognising our ongoing commitment to the disability community.



Image description: Jessica, Denise, Cherie (holding a glass trophy), Asoka, Mike (in his wheelchair and holding a certificate), Robyn and Yoky smiling at the Federation of Disability Information Centres Awards. Behind them are banners for the Federation and event sponsor Goldfern Mobility.

Impact and Reach

Our impact continues to grow across the country as families, disabled people, professionals, and community organisations rely on Disability Connect for trusted information, systemic advocacy, and support. The scale of our work reflects both rising demand and the depth of connection we have built with communities over many years.

Our Reach at a Glance

3.6K+ information requests

5.3K+ e-subscribers

25K+ e-newsletter readership

5.9K Facebook followers

These numbers show the strength of our communication systems and the trust families place in our service.



Image description: Roz (People for Us), Denise, Kaysey (People for Us), Cherie and Asoka meet to learn how we can all better safeguard disabled people in residential care. Roz holds a People for Us flyer.

Behind every statistic is a whānau seeking clarity, a disabled person needing support, or a professional wanting accurate information.

Our reach reflects growing national demand for DIAS support, increasing complexity across disability, housing, education, and health systems, and the importance of culturally grounded, lived-experience leadership.

Demand continues to rise beyond Auckland, with over 17 percent of our annual member survey responses now coming from outside the region. This highlights the national need for high-quality disability information and navigation support and signals our readiness for future growth.



Image description: April, our youngest volunteer, holds two flyers above her head at our Disability Information Stand at Fun Fest.

"Your newsletters are consistently informative, positive, and full of resources that help us stay connected and informed."

Community Engagement

Our community presence continues to grow, strengthening relationships, building trust, and ensuring disabled people and their families to have access to clear, culturally grounded information.

“Thank you, Denise, for the work you do and your dedication to the community. It is truly valued.”
– Member feedback

Our Community Information Advisors, Denise and Masina, connected with whānau, professionals, and organisations across Tāmaki Makaurau, supporting families at Manukau’s Fun Fest and engaging with more than 40 schools, community groups, health providers, and networks across Central, South, East, West, and Rodney.



Image description: Alex, Grace, Morgen, Lily-Mae, Tim and Leroy on Spirit of Adventure, wearing safety harnesses. It's a sunny day with some clouds, and the blue sea is behind them.

These visits helped frontline workers better understand disability supports and connected whānau to trusted guidance. We also presented at the ATSNZ Expo, sharing Transition Expo insights with disabled people, families, and sector professionals.

Spirit of Adventure Voyage

In February 2026 we farewelled six young disabled people, members of Disability Connect, and two buddies on the Spirit of Adventure.

Thank you to Cherie for the significant work undertaken to line up families, find suitable and available carers, ensure medical sign off, conduct briefings and liaise with the organisers.

“It’s hard to put into words how super happy Grace was. She hasn’t stopped chatting about the friendships she made and the crew onboard.”
– Wendy, Parent

“Sailing with Spirit of Adventure is something truly special. You see young people step beyond their fears and grow in confidence with every challenge.”
– Liz, Buddy

Disability Housing Information Service

Housing remains one of the most urgent and complex issues facing disabled people and their families.

To meet this need, we created something unique: a dedicated Disability Housing Information Service that provides clear information, practical guidance, and advocacy from a lived-experience perspective.

64 cases of housing information support

350+ housing enquiries

We are not a navigation service, sadly we can't promise outcomes that don't exist for everyone. What we offer is rare; specialist disability housing knowledge, personalised support, and someone walking beside families through a system that is often overwhelming.

Demand has grown rapidly: 65 enquiries in 2024 rose to over 350 enquiries in the last year, with 104 cases supported and nine families securing housing within two months. Along with families, we describe these outcomes as "miracles", reflecting both the worsening housing environment and the trust placed in our team.

Advisors provide up to 10 hours of tailored support over 6–26 weeks, covering assessments, applications, brokerage, eligibility guidance, and referrals to wraparound services.

"Three weeks later, after back and forth with MSD and the housing organisation, the family are now living under the same roof. You truly are the MVP."
– Perry, Spinal Support NZ

Evaluation findings show 100 percent satisfaction, improved wellbeing, stronger support arrangements, reduced stress, and better social connection.

Families also identified persistent barriers such as limited accessible housing, discrimination, financial pressure, and difficulty finding flatmates.

"Thanks to our expanding network of housing partners, both Pasifika families have now been successfully placed in more suitable and stable housing environments."
– Peters Trust Social Services

Housing Advocacy

Alongside direct support, we've played an active role in housing advocacy, via:

- Kāinga Kōrero community conversations: Social Housing and Preparing to Go Flatting
- Two Tūhono Kāinga housing newsletters
- NZDSN Auckland, presenting to disability providers on housing challenges
- Engagements with Laura Fergusson Trust to support their building of 180 accessible homes in the next 2 years
- Auckland Council's PC 120
- Engagements with builders, developers and the Community Housing Association
- Te Matapihi Māori Housing and Community Housing Association conferences
- NZ Disability Strategy - housing
- Engagements with CEO of Kāinga Ora, representatives from HUD, and main political parties
- NZ Certificate in Community Housing (Tenancy Management)

We also lead the Community Housing Collective, bringing together disability organisations to elevate the voices of disabled people and their whānau.

Why Our Voice Is Important

Housing is foundational to everyone's wellbeing. Without safe, accessible, affordable homes, people with age-related health concerns, disabled people, and their families face greater stress, poorer health outcomes, and fewer opportunities. With an ageing population, we are all in need of better housing choices.

The nine "miracles" achieved show what is possible when families receive the right information at the right time. We bring the voices and lived experience of those who use our service and the communities they reside in to advocate for housing choices that enable good lives.



Image description: A group of 43 people, including tangata whenua, outside a Homes of Choice accessible home in Māngere after its blessing. Three people, including Mike from Disability Connect, are sitting in front in wheelchairs. Masina from our team stands next to them.

Transition Expo

Our Transition Expo is the largest disability transition event in Aotearoa. In 2025, more than 1,500 people attended, including disabled school leavers, families, educators, providers, and government agencies.

The Expo was selected as the venue for a government announcement on changes to Disability Supports. The Minister's Press Secretary later told us it was "the best disability event she had attended since starting in her role."

The Expo's success reflects:

- Strong partnerships with MSD, schools, and providers
- Clear, accessible information for families
- A welcoming environment grounded in lived experience
- A commitment to showcasing diverse pathways for disabled young people

With support from the Ministry of Social Development and the Federation of Disability Information Centres, we are overseeing new Transition events in eight regions next year.

"Such a worthwhile event. Thank you for all the hard work and many many hours that you have invested into putting this on."



Image description: People at the entranceway of Transition Expo, some holding dark blue goodie bags. There is a large branded banner hanging at the top, and a ramp for wheelchair access which someone is using.

Without these events, a record number of disabled school leavers would miss out on coordinated transition information.

This work directly supports the Federation of Disability Information Centre's goal of strengthening Disability Information service capability across the motu and demonstrates our leadership in national Transition support.

Cultural Support and Inclusion

Disability Connect is committed to culturally inclusive practice. Our team provides support in six languages; Mandarin, Cantonese, Sinhalese, Hungarian, Samoan, and Filipino, and uses culturally preferred platforms such as WeChat and WhatsApp.

“We appreciate the organisation’s openness and cultural and language support. It makes a huge difference for migrant families.“

Our cultural support includes:

- Monthly cultural parents’ groups
- Weekly online Zoom support for parents and families
- Face-to-face support for migrant families
- Collaboration with Refugees as Survivors NZ
- Incorporation of karakia, prayers, and kai where appropriate

These approaches ensure families who face language, cultural, or digital barriers can still access timely and accurate information.

Our Advisors bring deep lived experience and community connections. Many are members of organisations such as Complex Care Group, Rare Disorders NZ, Blind Low Vision NZ, Parent to Parent, and IHC/IDEA Services.



Image description: A young man sits at the Parent Support Group, playing a colourful hand drum with a small mallet. An adult from the group holds the drum for him.

These relationships strengthen our cultural capability and ensure our work remains grounded in the realities of diverse communities.

“I’m so glad I went. The presentation was great, so informative to someone quite new.”
– Migrant Parent, about our Parent Support Group

Advocacy

Advocacy is central to our mission to lead and influence positive change. Over the past year, Disability Connect contributed to national conversations on housing, disability supports, emergency management, taxation, transport, and social policy.

We made submissions to MBIE, DIA, NEMA, IRD, MSD, Waka Kotahi, Auckland Council, Whaikaha for the NZ Disability Strategy review, Carers Action Plan, SESTA's review and The Royal Commission for COVID-19 Lessons Learned (Part 2).

In our Total Mobility Scheme submission, we advocated for recognition of disability-related transport barriers, better access for people with permanent disabilities, no trip caps or unnecessary reassessments that could increase hardship for disabled people and families.

We also called for greater availability of wheelchair-accessible transport, stronger safeguards for new providers, nationally consistent concessions, and greater recognition of the essential role transport plays in family wellbeing, employment, education and community participation.

While disappointed fare subsidies have reduced, we are pleased that Waka Kotahi recognised that participants in the scheme are disabled by the lack of choice, not their impairments, and that fare caps have not been introduced.

We also presented on Transition at the ATSNZ Expo, and on disability awareness to Master of Public Policy students at University of Auckland, and education students at Auckland University of Technology.

"The students commented afterwards on how great the discussion was and how much they valued hearing your perspectives."
– AUT Lecturer

These activities demonstrate our commitment to sector leadership and our willingness to share expertise for the benefit of the everyone.



Image description: Cherie speaks into a microphone as she presents her submission at the COVID-19 Lessons Learned inquiry.

Volunteers and Community Partners

Our work is strengthened by volunteers, partners, and community organisations who share our commitment to disabled people and their families. This year, that support was felt in many ways.

We were honoured to be chosen as the Charity of Choice at the Auckland Brick Show, receiving a $10,000 donation and meeting many new families.

Our volunteers contributed more than 400 hours across events, seminars, and outreach, and we celebrated their dedication with a morning tea where our local MP joined us to acknowledge their impact.

"You are our go-to for disability information. We rely on you for connection, learning, and advocacy."

Throughout the year, we engaged with a wide range of organisations and community partners at networking meetings and events, ensuring families receive holistic support and helping us maintain a strong presence across Auckland communities.

Rodney, one of Auckland's fastest-growing regions, is an area where families have told us they need more local support.

We are pleased to have initiated a partnership with Rodney Inclusive Communities Initiative (RICI), an organisation that aligns closely with our values.

With our backing, RICI will host an Inclusion Event and deliver Disability Supports in the Community sessions over the coming year, giving disabled people and their whānau in Rodney greater access to trusted information and connection.



Image description: Mike, in his wheelchair, holds a Disability Connect bag. Ursula and Mireille, our two new Ambassadors in Rodney, stand on either side in teal RICI t-shirts. Ursula holds a sign saying "inclusion & accessibility for all". Jess, Community Facilitator for Warkworth, stands behind Mike.

Workshops, Seminars and Support

Earlier this year we hosted *Woe to Go*, the first in a Work and Income explainer series with Sonja Eriksen, Principal Disability Advisor at MSD.

Families told us the session gave them vital insight into what to do when an application is declined, especially important in a system where 80 percent of complaints are upheld. More sessions are planned, including how to act as an agent and what to expect during a review.

"I have improved connections with others because of your groups and seminars."

We also launched *Using Your Voice*, a new self-advocacy series. Presenters from Disability Connect, Aotearoa Disability Law, People First, IHC Advocacy, PASAT, VisAble, Health and Disability Advocacy Service and Citizen Advocacy Auckland shared tools for understanding rights and getting advocacy. Several attendees have since used these skills already.

500+ support group attendees

200+ WeChat group members

400+ seminar, workshop and collaboration event attendees

"I am legally blind and physically disabled while also living with Autism. These *[Using Your Voice]* workshops were enriching and offered instrumental support for my mental health and work interests."
– Registered Counsellor

Across the year we delivered a strong programme of Zoom and in-person seminars, including *Planning for Adulthood*, *Education Legal Issues*, and *Disability Supports in the Community* that are increasingly attended by people from around the country.

"It has been so hard for too long, being the square peg in a round hole. To have online video support means I will always have some kind of connection."
– Zoom Support Group Attendee

Our combined Work and Income and Kaikaranga sessions in Sunnynook, Ōtara, and online reached more than 120 families and professionals, reflecting growing demand for clear, accessible information that helps people navigate increasingly complex systems.

Looking Ahead

Our team remind me constantly how important our work is. Demand for our services continues to grow by 12–15 percent, and the calls and emails we receive are more complex than ever.

Families need personalised, real-time advice from people who understand their world. That has always been the heart of Disability Connect.

Over 35 years, we've built a reputation as a trusted partner for disabled people, their parents, and the organisations that walk alongside them. As our digital presence has grown, more whānau from across the country are reaching out.

Our Board has affirmed our direction: to become a recognised and trusted national disability information service, while staying firmly grounded in our Auckland identity and the communities who shaped us.

In the year ahead, we will focus on scaling our Disability Housing Information Service, strengthen advocacy through dedicated communications, support 8 regional Transition Events, celebrate our 20th Transition Expo, host a Housing Hui to elevate disabled voices, and continue to invest in staff training and professional development.

We are deeply grateful to our funders for their ongoing support. Your partnership makes a real difference. Thank you for being part of our journey.

Together, we will keep leading positive change so disabled people and their whānau have the information, support, and opportunities they need to live good lives.

Ngā mihi nui,
Mike Potter
CEO - Disability Connect



Image description: Mike Potter smiling. He has short brown hair, and is wearing a light blue shirt and a dark blue vest.

"Your team is always responsive to phone and email support. I finally feel like someone understands our situation."

Thank you to our partners

MINISTRY OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT
TE MANATŪ WHAKAHIATO ORA

FOUNDATION NORTH
Pūtea Hāpai Oranga
Funding to Enhance Lives

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NW Matamata
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Health New Zealand
Te Whatu Ora

Four Winds FOUNDATION

COGS
Community Organisation Grants Scheme

SPECTRUM FOUNDATION
Ahākoa ko wai te tangata, ahākoa nō hea

LISTER PRESBYTERIAN
Health Trust

Davanti

CLIPBOARD

Image description: Logos for Ministry of Social Development, Foundation North, NZ Lottery Grants Board, Mercury, New World Matamata, Health New Zealand, Four Winds Foundation, Community Organisation Grants Scheme, Spectrum Foundation, Lister Presbyterian Health Trust, Davanti and Clipboard.



Image description: Thirteen members of the Disability Connect team stand and sit together, making heart shapes with their hands and arms. They all wear dark blue Disability Connect hoodies or vests.

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