

Other Booklets Produced by the Trust

- “Everybody Welcome? A Guide on How to Make Your Church Disability Friendly”
- Helpful Hints - For those who want to assist.
- Supporting People with Disabilities
- The Blessing of Including People with Disabilities in Your Church

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CMWDT

Christian Ministries With Disabled Trust

Evangelise Equip Educate



Working with a Group of People with Intellectual Disabilities

(Cover Photo: Joy Ministries meeting at Hawke's Bay Camp)

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Recommended Books

- Bowers, Faith, “*Who’s this sitting in my pew?*”, SPCK Publishing, 1988.
- Bowers, Faith, “*Let love be genuine: Mental Handicap and the Church*”, Published by Baptist Union (London), 1985.
- Dawn, Marva “*Joy in Our Weakness: A Gift of Hope from the Book of Revelation*”, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; Revised edition, 2002.
- Eareckson-Tada, J & Newman, G “*All God’s Children*” Zondervan; Rev Sub edition, 1993.
- Hubach, S, & Eareckson-Tada, J, “*Same Lake, Different Boat: Coming Alongside People Touched by Disability*” P & R Press, 2006.
- McCloughry, R, & Morris, W *Making a World of Difference: Christian Reflections on Disability*. London: SPCK, 2002.
- Nouwen, Henri, “*Adam: God’s beloved*”, Orbis Books, 1997.
- Vanier, Jean, “*Becoming Human*” Paulist Press; 2 edition, 2008.
- Vanier, Jean, “*I Meet Jesus: He Tells Me “I Love You” : Story of the Love of God Through the Bible*”, Paulist Press; 8 edition, 1981.
- Vanier, Jean, *The Heart of L’Arche: A Spirituality for Everyday*. New York: Crossroad, 1995.
- Webb-Mitchell, Brett, *Unexpected Guests at God’s Banquet: Welcoming People With Disabilities Into the Church*. New York: Crossroad, 1994.
- Yong, Amos, *Theology and Down Syndrome: Reimagining Disability in Late Modernity*. Waco. Baylor University Press, 2007.

Recommended Guides

Friendship Ministries in the USA, have a lot of very excellent guides and resources. See www.friendship.org , and also <http://friendship.org/materials/resources.asp?MaterialsMenu>

Bass, Simon, *“Special Children, Special Needs: Integrating Children with Disabilities & Special Needs Into Your Church”* Church House Pub. 2007

Breeding, Hood, & Whitworth, *“Let All the Children Come to Me: A Practical Guide to Including Children with Disabilities in Your Church Ministries”* David C. Cook, 2006

Carter, Erik, *“Including People With Disabilities in Faith Communities: A Guide for Service Providers, Families, & Congregations”* Paul H Brookes Pub Co, 2007

Ministry Among People with Disabilities” In *Lausanne Occasional Paper, no. 35B*, LOP, no. 35B, As seen on <http://www.lausanne.org/all-documents/lop-35b-ministry-among-people-with-disabilities.html>

Pierson, Jim, *“Exceptional Teaching: A Comprehensive Guide for Including Students With Disabilities”* Standard Publishing Company, 2002.

Pierson, Jim, *“No Disabled Souls: How to Welcome a Person With a Disability into Your Life and Your Church”* Standard Pub., 1998

Pierson, J (Ed) & Korth, R, *“Reaching Out to Special People: A Resource for Ministry With Persons Who Have Disabilities”*. Standard Pub., 1989.

Rapada, Amy, *“The Special Needs Ministry Handbook: A Church's Guide to Reaching Children with Disabilities and Their Families”* BookSurge Publishing, 2007.

“Special Needs, Special Ministry”, by Group Publishing Group Publishing (CO), 2003.



Joy Ministries group (for people with intellectual disabilities), participating in a group activity at our CMWDT National Camp



Enjoying a little fellowship with other members of the Joy Ministry group.

People with Intellectual Disabilities

The 2001 Census on Population & Dwellings survey estimated that 28,900 adults and 13,000 children in New Zealand have an intellectual disability. (1% of all adult New Zealanders, and 2% of children). (Statistics New Zealand. *Disability Counts 2001*. May, 2002).

This is a large population group, therefore there are people with intellectual disabilities everywhere in every community. In recent years we have seen the implantation of the positive Government policy of deinstitutionalisation, where people with intellectual disabilities were moved out of institutions and included into communities. There are a number of intellectually disabled people in your community, yet *how many disabled people do we see in our churches?*

People with Intellectual Disabilities are NOT Spiritually Disabled!

Although people with intellectual disabilities have varying degrees of intellectual ability, they are not spiritually disabled! Many intellectually disabled people are able to understand Christian theology and teachings, and to have a living relationship with Jesus. They can also be baptised with confidence, that they do hold faith in God. We have seen God work through many intellectually disabled people and showing significant spiritual insights. Remember not to underestimate disabled people, but to build any work alongside them on a solid foundation of partnership. We recommend in communicating the Gospel taking on the teaching from 1 Corinthians 2. We present the salvation message very clearly, using a wide range of visual aids & mediums. If people wish to respond to the gospel they can do so in a way that is appropriate for them. (i.e. An "AMEN", a hug if they love Jesus). The work of the Holy Spirit can & does transcend the intellect and mind!

Michael's Bible

It was National Camp in 2003. We were giving Bibles to new Believers in Jesus. On this night, Michael, (who is a Christian & happens to have Downs Syndrome) came to me because he heard that we were "giving out Bibles", and he wanted one!

Now I was faced with a dilemma. I knew Michael was already a Christian, and these Bibles were meant for new Believers. As well as that I was pretty sure Michael could not read, and if that was not enough, that year I had not bought enough Bibles and only had a few left. My initial thought was to turn Michael away, and explain to him that I was saving the Bibles for new Believers. Then I thought again...Michael was VERY keen to have a Bible and I simply thought, "Why Not?" Why is he not as deserving as anyone else to get one? So I gave him one of the last Bibles we had. He was so happy to receive it...

The next day his mother came to me and thanked me for giving Michael a Bible. She told me that he'd wanted one because he wished to be like everyone else at church and have a Bible with him at church. She also confirmed to me that Michael couldn't read, but that it meant a lot to him to simply have a Bible.

Some time later I was speaking with Michael's mother again, and she was excited to tell me the impact that having a Bible had on Michael's faith. He'd become more enthusiastic at attending church, and sat up the front. Before each service he'd go to the Pastor and ask him to open his Bible to the passage he would be preaching from that service, which the Pastor was happy to do. When others were reading from their Bibles, Michael would be looking at his also. Further to that, she said the most exciting thing was Michael was now beginning to READ for the first time! And that he had learnt to read from this same Bible! The Holy Spirit had worked a miracle! (Michael was still not able to read from any other book at this time).

As she said this I thought about the implications of NOT giving Michael this Bible, that I had originally wanted to hang on to. God had used His Word to strengthen Michael's faith! He just wanted to be like everybody else.

A Couple of Stories...

“Jesus loves me!” - Robert

It was 2000, and we were at our annual National Camp at Labour Weekend. I had been “buddied” up with Robert, who just needed a little support and supervision. (Robert happens to have Downs Syndrome).

On the second day of Camp I saw Robert looking at his Bible. I didn't know Robert well at that stage, and thought I'd better be careful what I said. I convey here our brief conversation...

Evan — “*Robert, Can you read?*”

Robert — “*YES*”

Evan — “*Would you like to read something to me?*”

Robert — “*YES*”

(Robert flicks through his Bible and stopped at a mid-section, which had cartoon like pictures of Bible stories...and then proceeded to “read”)...

Robert — “*JESUS LOVES ME, ...AND GOD IS IN CONTROL!*”

(Robert then closed his Bible matter of factly, and placed it neatly on the bed beside him, and looked up contently at me)

Evan — “*That's excellent Robert! Thank you for reading that to me*”

I then tried to process what had just happened, and our brief conversation. I concluded — What more do you really need to know about our Christian faith? I think there's a tendency to over complicate things, and maybe our faith CAN be summed up very succinctly as Robert so eloquently verbalised, in a nutshell... “**Jesus loves me...and God is in control!**”

If we KNOW and EXPERIENCE only those two truths in our Christian lives, then I believe we'd be in a pretty good place!

Speak to Intellectually Disabled People as equals

Remember that people with intellectual disabilities are people first. So speak as you would to anyone else. Also remember that communication is a two way thing. Allow time and space for the person with an intellectual disability to communicate what they wish to. Sometimes there are communication difficulties, so be patient and take the time to listen. Show genuine care, and give people respect by doing this. When communicating err on aiming at the middle ground, you do not know how much people with an intellectual disability are grasping and understanding. Use simpler language where possible. Use repetition and vivid examples. Use questions and interaction throughout your communication. Remember to speak to people at a level that is appropriate to them. (If you are communicating with an adult — keep in mind that they also, like you, have adult interests). (*Teaching materials are listed at the end of publication*).

The Leaders

Leaders of a group of people with intellectual disabilities don't need to be experts, or experienced in working with disabled people. Claire writes, “*We have simply taken up the work as we have felt called. God uses willing hearts.*” This is a key. It's helpful for the leader to have experience in working with people with intellectual disabilities but is not essential. If you are keen to start a group the knowledge necessary can easily be gained by participating in an existing group for a period of time, as well as talking with experienced people. Other volunteers in the group don't have to be experienced either. Although experience does help, it shouldn't stop you from beginning a group. A prerequisite is to be willing to learn, and a desire to be involved and make a positive difference in the lives of people with intellectual disabilities.

Church

As the Body of Christ we are called to accept and include ALL people. We see in the ministry an example of Jesus Christ, His acceptance of people with disabilities, and clear teaching to His church to ensure those people who are marginalised are deliberately brought into, and included in His kingdom.

(See Luke 14:15-24, Luke 4:18-19, Acts 2, Revelation 7:9-10). It does not matter if you are not experts in this area. God is looking for people who are ready to step out under His guidance and direction. God asks us to walk alongside people with intellectual disabilities — He will do the enabling.

- All people are created in the image of God (Gen.1:27), this of course includes people with intellectual disabilities.
- Remember people are individuals. It is important to offer and respect choice. Some people prefer to sit up the front, others like to sit at the back. Most people simply sit with their friends. Let disabled people choose where they want to sit.
- Ensure people with disabilities are included in the welcome time. Like all people, it is nice when people introduce themselves, and come over to shake hands during the welcome time.
- Show grace if individuals with disabilities are a little “disruptful” in the meeting. If it is inappropriate behaviour, have someone remind them quietly what is expected. (A person sitting with them can demonstrate appropriate behaviour). Remember, we are the Body of Christ and should accept our differences. (i.e. One person saying loud “AMEN’S” at the end of prayer time. Individual enthusiastic expression such as this is OK!)
- For some people with intellectual disabilities you may need to assign them a personal helper for the service.

Summary of Hints to Walk Alongside People with Intellectual Disabilities

- Give and show dignity & respect
- Listen & encourage communication
- Treat people as your equal
- Treat people as adults. (Be age appropriate)
- Keep confidentiality
- Keep your promises
- Give people space to show their intelligence
- Ask about a person’s feelings & what choices they want. (Give people space to make their *own* decisions)
- Ask about what you *need* to know about your friend. (i.e. health issues — if relevant. But ask the disabled person first).
- Let a relationship of friendship develop, based on mutual respect and walking alongside each other
- Be reasonable & set good boundaries
- Be patient
- Have a sense of humour
- It’s *Ok* to make mistakes — but learn from them!
- Have you ever had a bad day? (People with intellectual disabilities have bad days too! Show grace)

10. Collection

It is good for people with intellectual disabilities to contribute to overseas mission, or your own ministry, or both. People with disabilities can serve by taking up the collection.

Perhaps someone could speak about what the collection is for, and why people like supporting a particular ministry or mission.

11. Food

This could be afternoon or morning tea, or a shared meal. The food could be provided by a team of volunteers from the church, or by whoever is hosting the event. Different churches or groups could provide the food for the meetings. Or the participants could bring a plate of food each. Keep it simple.

12. Reviewing

This is to review the teaching of the meeting, and go over the main points. Reviewing last week's lesson can happen as the first part of the next week's session. It can be as simple as going over the main points covered again, or you could have a quiz, and get more participation. Rewards for remembering can also assist memory! - such as a chocolate fish to anyone who remembers one of the main points. You could take this a step further and divide the group into equal smaller teams and make the quiz a fun competition. Remember, the more senses you engage, the more likely people are to retain the knowledge.

- It may be more appropriate to have home-groups or separate services, that cater specifically for the needs of people with intellectual disabilities. (This should never be an excuse to exclude disabled people in church).
- When planning social activities at church, please remember to include people with intellectual disabilities. Socialising and building relationships outside of the church service is an important and normal part of life.
- Make simplified notes in bullet points so that the participants can take them home and go over the teaching in their own time, if they want to. (This helps with understanding and retention of points covered).
- Do not underestimate the activity of the Holy Spirit in a person's life — God is well able to get His truths into people with intellectual disabilities that sometimes supersedes the intellect. (We can also help the process of discipleship by teaching in an uncomplicated way).
- It is beneficial to have sign post facilities erected in the church building (such as the one below) — using pictorial signs as well as words.



- We need to bring people with intellectual disabilities into our churches where they need to be received into a loving, welcoming and accepting place. They also need room to grow and contribute with the church congregation. We need to seek out people with intellectual disabilities, and bring them into the church — otherwise the Body of Christ is not complete.

Transport

If you are considering providing meetings for people with intellectual disabilities, the transport needs of the individuals you are hoping will access this service must be considered.

Many people with intellectual disabilities cannot drive, and some cannot access public transport independently. Therefore someone will need to be responsible for organising the transport to and from the venue for those people who need it, and also personal support if need be. The responsibility of organising transport can be shared, it need not be a burden on one individual.

Arranging transport could be as simple as asking a friend of the person with an intellectual disability or their family member to bring them to the meeting. Perhaps this same person could stay for the meeting and assist in different ways, or support the person they have brought.

Sometimes a support worker in a supported living community home may bring their van, and more than one person with an intellectual disability to a meeting, and also stay and assist. This is ideal. You will need to individually assess needs, and speak to the person with an intellectual disability as well as their support person to best determine their transport needs.



9. Craft/ Activity

You can use many different creative ideas here. The craft or activity should back up the main point of the meeting. It could assist to reinforce the theme. Doing something practical reflecting points of the message helps with memory retention. Because some people with disabilities may need assistance with craft, you may need a higher ratio of volunteers to participants. Full participation is the key — people should participate to the level of their abilities. If they are able to do it themselves they should. (You may need to educate your volunteers not to just do things for their disabled friends). Don't be directive, the aim is not to be a Picasso or Rembrandt, but to be involved with physically creating something that they can be proud of and can take home. Some lesson materials also include a take home activity. Some examples of possible activities are a colouring-in picture depicting a Biblical passage, and including the Bible verse of the day. You could do pottery, or collage, or painting. Do a puzzle or maze on paper with the Prodigal Son at one end connecting with the Father at the other. You could do "stained glass windows" with coloured pieces of paper. Be creative and go for it! Ask the participants to suggest activities they would like.



7. Play/ Drama

Plays/dramas are an excellent way to get a message across, and have fun. They are also a good way to have group participation. Everybody can be involved, if they want to be. You could have simple dramas with a narrator, and a few props. (These don't need to be expensive or complex, a few costumes, hats and masks for different characters is enough) The main point is to clearly convey the message you are wanting to teach. A good idea is to debrief after the play, ask people what they thought the main points were.

A drama can simply be a way for people to have fun, and interact more with each other. You may identify people who are particularly talented in acting, and this should be encouraged. The group could present a learnt drama to a church. Biblical parables often lend themselves to be acted out. You could use a modern interpretation of a parable — (i.e. using cell phones to represent praying/ speaking to God).



8. Communion

Full participation is encouraged. Have different people with disabilities pray for the emblems, as well as distributing them. Some in your group can collect up the cups at the end of communion, and others can wash up the communion cups! Each time communion is shared, a different person could share what communion means to them. And they could share a Bible passage relating to communion. This needs to be arranged well in advance to give them time to prepare. You may need to arrange a support person.

Walking Alongside People with Intellectual Disabilities as Friends

- There are some people with intellectual disabilities who need a friend. People are waiting for someone like you to turn up and simply walk alongside them.
- Build friendships through common interests. Again people are individuals, find out what your friend likes and dislikes. Appreciate each person as an individual, and recognise and encourage their individual giftings and talents.
- Sometimes there can be behavioural challenges. Try to understand why the person is expressing themselves in this way, maybe frustrations etc, and show much grace. If a particular behaviour is inappropriate, talk to your friend's family or enquire of their support worker about effective ways that they use to manage this behaviour, and you do the same.
- Be faithful to your friends, and be trustworthy, if you say you will be there one day, BE there. Only promise what you are able to realistically do.
- Remember that friendship is a two way thing, it is really important to give your friends with intellectual disabilities opportunities to assist you in things — not just the other way around, with you helping them.

A format for Meetings/ Services for People with Intellectual Disabilities

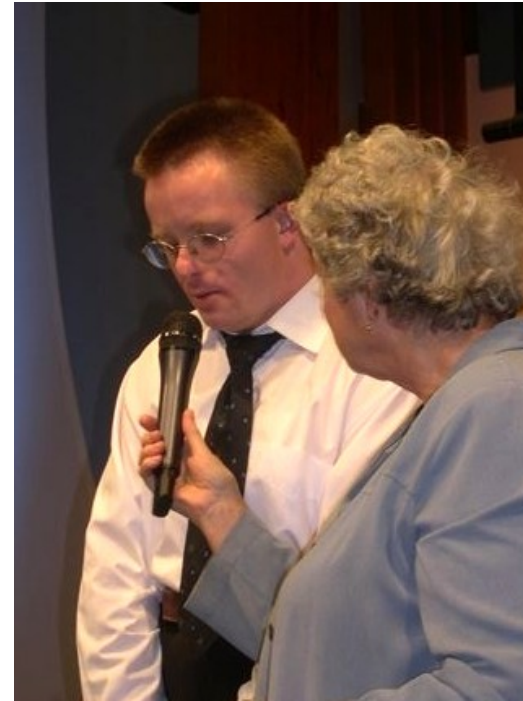
1. **Theme/ General**
2. **Worship**
3. **News**
4. **Notices**
5. **Prayer**
6. **Message/Story**
7. **Play/ Drama**
8. **Communion**
9. **Craft**
10. **Collection**
11. **Food**
12. **Reviewing**

(Meetings do not necessarily need to have all of the above parts included. Vary it and do what is best for the group).

1. Theme/ General

It is good to have a theme for each meeting to integrate the whole time. This also helps with knowledge retention, and has a whole lot of benefits.

Consider the length of the meeting or service. Make the length of the meeting appropriate for the group. (Remember when planning that intellectually disabled people may have a shorter attention span).



Michael Bridgeman
speaking at our National
Disability Awareness Service,
Harbourside Church, 2008

6. The Message

The main teaching time of the meeting. The message needs to be related to the overall theme — with everything structured around it.

The message could be an object lesson, from the Bible, or a story. It should be presented in many different creative ways — using different media to teach the points. Visual aids are vital, such as PowerPoint, OHP, or DVD/ video clips.

You could also consider acting out the Bible scenes. Another great idea is to use real objects.

We should learn from Jesus' storytelling and teaching techniques - He often told short, simple, vivid stories based on everyday things people were familiar with — such as the harvest, or going on a journey, or baking bread, etc...

- Structure the message to bring out the teaching clearly. Teach in a way that the points are simple, clear, concise. Use repetition and simple language. Teach the main points in two or three different ways. (i. e. For a Bible story, speak about a modern-day example of the same story, and use a direct application to your participants lives).
- Try speaking in short segments, and back up each by drama or action songs that reinforce the point. Use vivid examples and visual aids. Engage all the senses (which aids retention). (I.e. For a Bible story, you could act out the Bible scene or message — being physically active assists in learning).
- Remember in teaching stories from the Bible, many of the things Jesus taught about will be outside of today's common experience, and unfamiliar to people. You need to think about how it applies to people today. (I.e. Few of us have experience of harvesting a crop, so you may need to demonstrate this by using real objects — sowing seeds in a pot, hay bales, machines etc). You could also use a modern analogy that teaches the same point instead.

2. Worship

The whole meeting or service is worshipping God. It's about the whole Body of Christ giving praise to God together. Full participation is what we value highest in worship. It's not about having a good singing voice, or dancing well. ALL believers should be free to express their love of God.

- Ensure disabled people are brought in on decisions made about worship. Don't make decisions without consulting people first.
- Ensure the song choice is age appropriate — i.e. the songs might be "simple" in nature, but shouldn't be childish. Include songs with easy to learn choruses. Songs are a great way to learn Scripture. (Use good worship resources - such as Scripture in Song). Encourage the learning of new songs and introduce these one at a time.
- Action songs are a good way to get participation and movement in worship. Someone will need to teach the actions. If people don't get the actions right, it's OK!
- Be creative. Ribbons or coloured flags can be effective to aid worship with movement and dance. Give people time and space to be creative and express themselves freely.
- Let people choose different musical instruments to participate more fully in worship, if they want to. (I.e. maracas, shakers, or percussion instruments). Teach people to play together to complement the whole worship experience. Create a JOYFUL noise!
- Use visual aids with teaching songs. First explain the meaning of the song and words clearly. (Some people with intellectual disabilities may not read — use PowerPoint pictures to teach what the words mean).

3. News

This presents an opportunity for the participants to share their news with the whole group. The leader could stand up the front, and the person with an intellectual disability stands beside them and tells his or her news to the group.

Sometimes speech difficulties mean the leader or the person's friend may need to "translate" and repeat the news to the group. It is good to encourage participants to build up the other group members in the Lord, by sharing a recent answer to prayer, or maybe a meaningful Bible verse. They could share how God has led them recently. The leader may need to guide this time, and be on hand to keep the sharing brief if need be.



4. Notices

Here you can talk about upcoming meetings, events, church services, outings and activities. Remember to have these in visual form, such as presented on a PowerPoint, Overhead Projector, or large notice board, as well as talking about them. You could also have small "flyers" for the participants to take home advertising the next event, to assist them in remembering it. Remember also to be excited about the upcoming events, and to communicate your enthusiasm.

5. Prayer

No one seems to have any difficulty with the idea of "talking to God" but our prayers are often restricted. "Please" and "Thank you" prayers aren't enough. It's important to have other prayer, such as confession and repentance. People could pray "I'm sorry" prayers to God, as well as asking forgiveness of anyone they have hurt. Keep to short prayers, with plain language and basic concepts. Encourage participants to pray for and show concern for each other - it is always appreciated when we pray for one of the participants or their family's needs. Remember to ensure that it is not a one way process between the volunteers and participants — have people with intellectual disabilities pray for the "able bodied" volunteers. Different types of prayer format can help, you can have a wide variety — individuals praying, small groups, big groups. Being in a circle and taking turns to pray is a great way to encourage people to participate, (although people must be given the choice not to pray). You may also wish to choose a more set format for the prayer time, such as **A.C.T.S.** — **A**doration, **C**onfession, **T**hanksgiving, and **S**upplication. (A format like this helps avoid our prayer times becoming like "shopping lists" where we only ask God for things — rather than the full range that prayer should be).

