

Act to include the handicapped

EQUALITY FOR ALL

ON 25 NOVEMBER, the Premier introduced into the New South Wales Parliament legislation which will significantly affect the lives of physically handicapped people.

This legislation will amend the New South Wales Anti-Discrimination Act to include physical impairment as a ground for discrimination. The Act, which at present outlaws discrimination on the grounds of sex, race and marital status, will make it illegal for people to be discriminated against on the grounds of their physical disability. It is expected that the amendments will be passed in the first Parliamentary session, 1981.

The Anti-Discrimination Board believes that this legislation will lead to a closer examination by the community of their attitudes and priorities towards people with physical disabilities. The amendments to the Anti-Discrimination Act will allow people to assert their rights in the areas of employment, accommodation, access to goods and services, access to public places and vehicles, government educational institutions and registered clubs.

The importance of legal rights

Many issues are of great importance to the independence of handicapped people, but few

are as fundamental as the need for legal rights. Without them the disabled are locked into a situation which denies them any real opportunity for individual autonomy. People with rights may make their own decisions and take control of their own destinies. People without rights must remain supplicant and subordinate.

Discrimination has been defined as a denial of equal opportunity based on prejudice. Prejudice is an adverse judgment formed irrationally or without full knowledge of the facts. It is grounded in myths and stereotypes which bear no relationship to reality but which can work to deny an individual access to opportunities available to others.

The Anti-Discrimination Board's report *Discrimination and Physical Handicap* defines a handicapped person as 'one who as a result of a physical impairment, together with community attitudes and the physical environment is substantially limited in the opportunity to enjoy a full and active life'.

The Board quite deliberately included as important aspects of the definition physical environment and community attitudes. The difficulty many handicapped people have faced in gaining access to equal opportunity lies in the lack of awareness on the part of the community as to the needs, and indeed the

very existence, of people who are handicapped.

Separated

How many of us are aware that 10 percent of the population, or half a million people in New South Wales alone suffer a chronic limiting condition? We are shielded from this awareness by schooling which segregates the handicapped, by institutions which conceal the immobile, by buildings which exclude those in wheelchairs, by lack of curiosity about where the elderly are, and by the invisibility of one of the most common disabilities – deafness.

Because the physically disabled are separated from the rest of the community a vicious circle sets in: the community does not have contact with the disabled, so they are not included in its planning; particularly architectural planning. A person in a wheelchair, when confronted by such barriers as a flight of stairs or unsuitable toilet facilities does not need a sign saying 'Keep Out', to know they are not wanted. Proposed legislation to amend Building Regulations (Ordinance 70) to allow the physically handicapped access to new public use buildings is currently before the Government. Hopefully, this legislation will be passed before the end of 1981.

The affect of having legislation will enable people with handicaps to insist on their rights in employment, in housing and accommodation, in education, and in the provision of goods and all important services.

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IYDP: There's money to spend . . .



Official symbol for IYDP

EVERYONE MUST be aware that this year is the International Year of Disabled Persons.

This issue of *Incite* is an attempt to cover some aspects of IYDP. If you know of any projects which are happening, or should be happening, in your area please let us know as we hope to cover news about IYDP throughout the year.

The planning for Australia's participation in IYDP began in 1976 following a resolution passed at the General Assembly of the United Nations. The National Advisory Council for

the Handicapped (NACH) and the Standing Interdepartmental Committee on Rehabilitation (SIDCOR) have been working since then to encourage government bodies and voluntary organisations, private enterprise, etc to participate in special activities for the Year which will be of on-going benefit to disabled people.

The Federal Government awarded \$400,000 towards the Year – this has been divided between the states and territories. In addition, various state governments have contributed. For instance, the New South Wales State Government allocated \$750,000 to the Minister for Youth and Community Services 'to promote the aims and observance of the IYDP throughout the State', and the Queensland government has contributed \$100,000.

You don't need to be a mathematical wizard to see there's a fair bit of money to be spent this year. If you have a project in mind which would help disabled people, but need funds to get it off the ground, get in touch with the IYDP committee in your state.

There's a national IYDP Unit (Canberra) and a National Committee of Non-Government Organisations (NCNGO). Each state and territory has an IYDP Secretariat and a NCNGO member. A list of contacts appears elsewhere this issue.

. . . but don't hold your breath

PLANS TO PRODUCE a library resource kit for distribution to all Victorian libraries have bogged down – mainly due to slowness of allocation of funds from the IYDP State Committee.

The resource kit has been devised by a sub-committee from the LAA Victorian Branch, and will contain display material, bibliographies, checklists for library access and function for disabled users, guidelines for librarians on how to encourage use of libraries by disabled people, and contacts for information on resources in appropriate formats.

Plans to distribute the kit to all Victorian public and school libraries are now awaiting a possible ministerial decision in mid-May, although the first submission for funding was made in December.

The group producing the kit feels strongly that the effectiveness of the kit will be jeopardised by this time lag, and this feeling has been reinforced by constant enquiries to individual members of the sub-committee for display and informational material on IYDP for use in libraries.