

**Pacific Disability Forum (PDF) and
Australia Pacific Islands Disability Support (APIDS)**

**Capacity Development for Effective and Efficient
Disabled Persons Organisations in
Pacific Island Countries**

Report on Cook Islands component of Research

1. Introduction

In March 2011, the Cook Islands was the second country to be studied in a Pacific-wide research program “Capacity Development for Effective and Efficient Disabled People’s Organisations (DPOs) in Pacific Island Countries”. Eleven countries are part of the program and will be visited before June 2012. This research is run by Pacific Disability Forum (PDF) and Australia Pacific Islands Disability Support (APIDS) and is funded by AusAID.

The research team in Cook Islands included members from PDF and APIDS as well as one in-country researchers who is from the Creative Centre as well as being a member of the National Disability Council in Cook Islands.

2. What did the research team do?

Before the research started, we all agreed that the research would:

- Look at what DPOs are good at (strengths based approach) and how these strengths can help the organisation grow
- Make sure that people with any disability could take part
- Make sure that all people are respected in meetings and workshops
- Respect community protocols and customs

The research team had the following events in Cook Islands in the week of 28 March to 1 April 2011:

- Meetings with board members, staff and members of National Disability Council ,Te Vaerua and Creative Centre
- Meeting with the Director, Disability Issues in the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Social Services
- Workshop with members and staff of Creative Centre and representatives from National Disability Council and Te Vaerua

3. What we found out

People who took part in the research told the research team that:

1. Advocacy on the rights of people with disabilities has been very successful in the Cook Islands; the voice of people with disabilities in this process has been valued
2. Disability service providers want to include people with disabilities on their boards and as staff
3. There is strong support for people with disabilities from family, community, two service provider organisations and Government
4. Disability service providers highlight the need for training, mentoring and leadership training for people with disabilities to enable them to manage organizations in future. There is a strong preference for this to be undertaken in Cook Islands.
5. The flow of people between Cook Islands and New Zealand and Australia means that organizations find it difficult to: meet quorum requirements for board meetings; recruit and retain trained/experienced staff members; maintain the continuous delivery of services; achieve all the objectives they set in their plans
6. Many older people who have lived overseas retire to the Cook Islands with the potential, as they age, to develop disabilities and become dependent on service support systems

7. There is a collaborative and respectful relationship between Government and the disability service providers and the National Disability Council
8. Disability service providers are supportive of assisting the establishment of a DPO (an advocacy organization run by people with disabilities)
9. The Director of Disability is willing to support CI NDC to become the national DPO
10. Disability service providers want to obtain long-term funding so they can provide ongoing services
11. People consider that the small population of Cook Islands means there should not be too many separate organizations. There could be too much competition between organizations for funding, for members, for board members and staff members.
12. The Boards of the two major service providers and the National Disability Council are well connected to the private sector and value the support provided by them.
13. It is very difficult and costly for disability organizations to support people with disability in outer islands.
14. When training and services are provided and new ideas introduced, then follow-up activities are very important.
15. Volunteers are very important in both the National Disability Council and in the service provider organizations.
16. There are different views on whether Cook Islands should have its own DPO.
17. There is a commitment for organizations to collaborate and increasing examples of sharing resources.

Cook Islands is different from other Pacific Island countries, in that while there are two member organisations of PDF which consider themselves to be DPOs, neither of these organisations appear to be consistent with the broader international definition of DPOs. Discussions in meetings included

the issue of how to ensure people with disability were involved as leaders and board members of organisations.

At the workshop participants asked to start the process of setting up a DPO. This led to some nominated office bearers, discussion of organisational objectives, and an action plan for a new organisation. This group has subsequently met again, but there is no clarity yet on the organisation's status.

4. Next steps

A full research report of Cook Islands will be given to all the people involved in the research.

The research team will visit another 10 countries in the next 12 months, and then a report will be written about the whole project in mid-2012.

The researchers hope that this project will help DPOs to become stronger organizations, both through their own efforts and through appropriate support provided by other organizations.

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