

Understanding the Access Visitor

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venture
TARANAKI
Te Puna Umanga

An initiative
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District Council



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REPORT PREPARED FOR VENTURE TARANAKI
BY BRIELLE GILLOVIC AND ALISON MCINTOSH,
AUCKLAND UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY



Introduction

Scope

Accessibility has been identified as a key focus area of the Taranaki region's visitor sector and economy. In May 2022, Venture Taranaki commissioned Auckland University of Technology (AUT) to provide a clear understanding of the value of the access market, best practice models, the actions required (based on the current status in Taranaki) to position the region as a leader in the field, and an incorporation of educational initiatives to start the process. The aim of this report is to provide an understanding of the needs of the access visitor.

Workshop

This report was developed from a workshop with access stakeholders in the region, with the purpose of exploring how tourism could be made more accessible and inclusive in the Taranaki region through a focus on understanding the needs of the access visitor.

Venture Taranaki hosted a two-hour workshop in New Plymouth on August 22, 2022, which was facilitated by Professor Alison McIntosh and Dr Brielle Gillovic of Auckland University of Technology (AUT). To understand the needs of people with different disability types, a range of access organisations were invited to participate in the workshop. Invitations extended to both specific and pan disability access organisations. Eight representatives from the following access organisations attended: **Alzheimers**

Taranaki, CCS Disability Action, Deaf Aotearoa, Epilepsy NZ, People First Taranaki, and Taranaki Disabilities Information Centre.

These organisations provide services to support people with disabilities and other access requirements to live their best quality of life with independence and alongside their carers. They also provide advocacy, raise awareness, and deliver training and education. In reading, it should be noted that the views and content reflect only those of the participants in the workshop and may exclude the views of access organisations representing different disability types.

Participants were asked to engage in a collaborative round table discussion with other access stakeholders in the region. The aim of this session was to understand the needs of the access visitor to inform best practice for tourism operators in the region. The first part of the workshop focused on the nature and characteristics of people with different disability types and other access requirements, and their communication needs. The second part of the workshop focused on how tourism operators could better provide access and inclusion to people with different disability types and other access requirements, to determine what actions could be prioritised.

This report presents a summary of the ideas highlighted as important by the participants during the workshop. The first section focuses on communicating with the access visitor and understanding their needs, the second section provides advice to tourism operators, and finally, recommendations are offered.



Defining accessible tourism

Accessible tourism enables people with access requirements to engage independently and with equity and dignity in tourism. This definition is inclusive of all people, including those travelling with children in prams, seniors, and people with disabilities, as well as the carers and companions who may travel with them¹. While much of the report will focus on disability, specifically, we recognise there is a broader market that may be served when providing accessibility.

Disability reflects the interaction between features of a person's body and features of the society in which he or she lives². Within an everyday as well as a tourism context, people with disabilities will have various types of impairments (i.e., physical, sensory, intellectual, mental, or other), varying levels of support needs (i.e., independent, low, medium, high, or severe), as well as a variety of motivations and desired experiences.

A note on language

While the use of 'disabled person/people' aligns with the legislative nomenclature of New Zealand, we give preference in this report to 'people with disabilities,' which aligns with the social model of disability and its discourse around person-first language³. In practice, it is ultimately up to the individual in question as to how they wish to be addressed or referred to.

1 Darcy, S., & Dickson, T. (2009). A whole-of-life approach to tourism: The case for accessible tourism experiences. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, 16(1), 32-44. <https://doi.org/10.1375/jhtm.16.1.32>

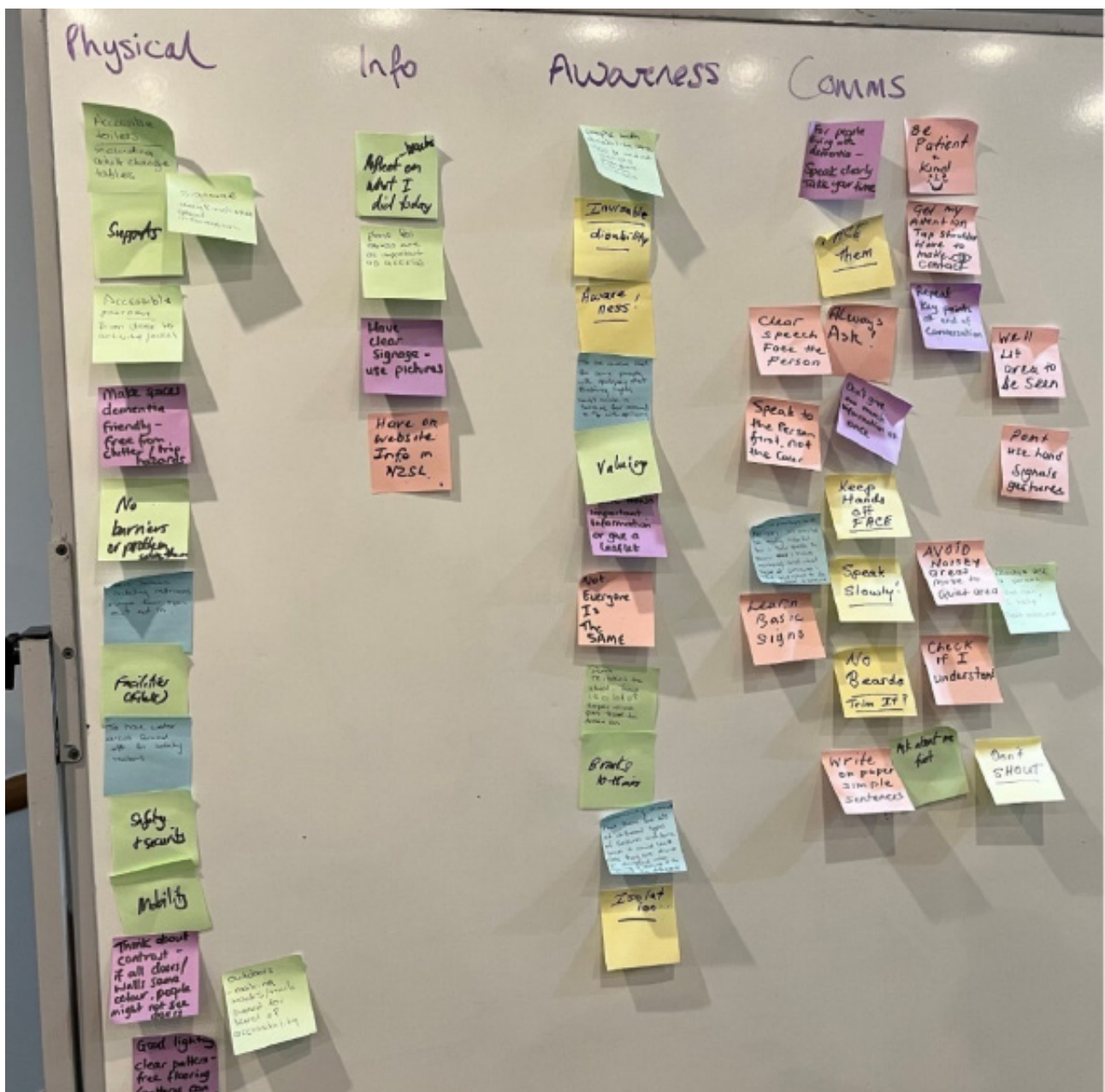
2 Office for Disability Issues. (2022). *The new disability strategy*. <https://www.odi.govt.nz/nz-disability-strategy/about-the-strategy/new-zealand-disability-strategy-2016-2026/the-new-disability-strategy-download-in-a-range-of-accessible-formats/>

3 Gillovic, B., McIntosh, A., Darcy, S., & Cockburn-Wootton, C. (2018). Enabling the language of accessible tourism. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 26(4), 615-630. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2017.1377209>

Communicating with the access visitor and understanding their needs

In this section, we present what the workshop participants wanted tourism operators to know about the nature and characteristics of people with different disability types and other access requirements, and the most appropriate ways to communicate and interact with them. We categorised their responses around four key aspects: 'physical accessibility,' 'information,' 'awareness,' and 'communication.'

Figure 1 Participants' top tips





Physical accessibility

One key aspect the participants raised was around knowledge of physical accessibility.

Table 1 Physical accessibility

Physical accessibility
• Accessible journey – from door to activity/event.
• No barriers – or problem solve them.
• Good lighting.
• Think about contrast – if all doors/walls are the same colour, people might not see them.
• Clear, pattern-free flooring (patterns can affect depth perception).
• Mobility.
• Make spaces dementia friendly – free from clutter/trip hazards.
• Outdoors – making tracks/trails signed for level of accessibility.
• Signage and wayfinding.
• Have clear signage – use pictures.
• Safety and security.
• To have water areas fenced off for safety reasons.
• Supports.
• Have seizure safety restrooms – where door opens out not in.
• Facilities (e.g., toilets).
• Accessible toilets – including adult change tables.



Physical accessibility is often what the access visitor seeks out first. The workshop participants raised the following points:

- Transportation to, from and within the destination needs to be accessible, whether that be airlines, trains, boats, buses, shuttles, taxis or driving services. Tour buses, for example, often have steps to board them. Public transportation is crucial, as is an awareness of the availability and acceptability of the Total Mobility Scheme in New Zealand. Accessible car parks at the venue should be located right outside the main entrance, although they are often not as close as they should be.
- Accessible bathrooms are often limited in space, especially if they are in an older building. They should be able to accommodate different wheelchair sizes and include adult change tables. Doors should open outwards rather than inwards, as this prevents people with epilepsy getting caught if they have a seizure.
- Wheelchairs are all different sizes, so there needs to be an awareness of this and the amount of physical space available. It takes 150 centimetres to turn a wheelchair around and often this space is not accounted for. Small doorways and lips into showers should be avoided and is helpful to have a lowered counter to interact at the wheelchair users height.
- Reliable equipment hires, for example, toilet raisers, toilet surrounds or wheelchairs, as well as the collection and return of this equipment, is important when travelling.

- Consideration of potential mobility issues within a variety of terrains and natural settings is important. Mobility nights at the TSB Festival of Lights in New Plymouth, was seen as an example of good practice, from the accessible parking and buggy transport up and down the hill to mobility scooter hire.
- Large signage with good contrast and placed at an appropriate height is important for wayfinding. Communication of walking distances is also important, for example, between the boarding gate and baggage claim, as temporary wheelchair assistance may be required and/or planned for in advance. There should also be an easy direct route to the main entrance, reception or assistance desk.

"Emergency needs to be accommodated for if a client is hearing impaired – come to the room and tap them on the shoulder and let them know, or use vibrating altering devices under pillows – accommodations for deaf people."

Information

An important aspect the participants raised was in the provision of information.

Figure 3 Information

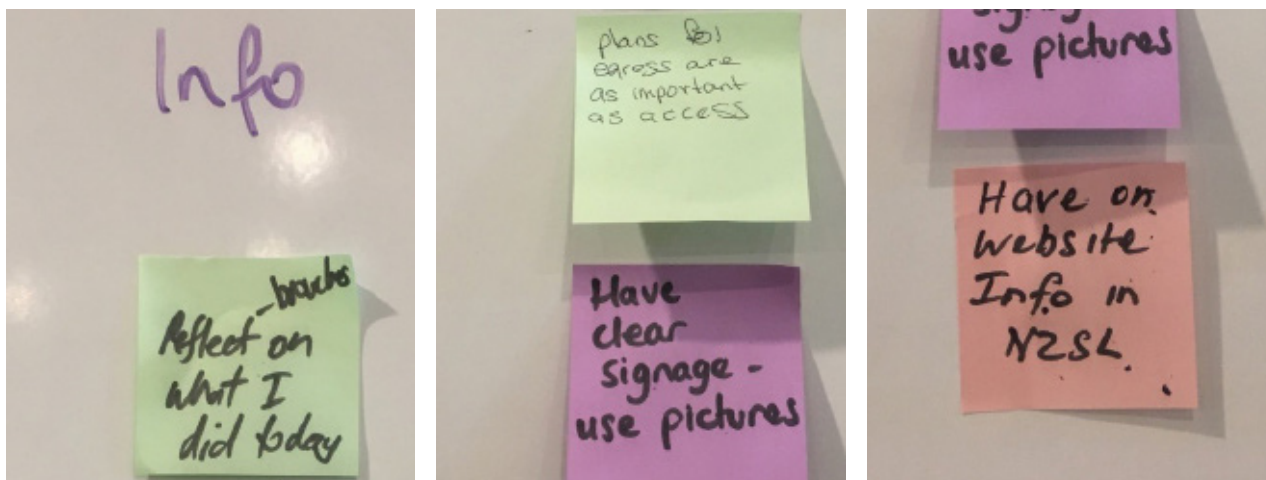


Table 2 Information

Information
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Good information.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Have information on the website in New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL).
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Write down important information or give a leaflet.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Brochures to reflect on what I did today.

Information is critical to the access visitor. The workshop participants raised the following points:

- It is essential that accurate information is readily available to the access visitor prior to travelling, to allow for the different ways in which people plan. Not only should information on the accessibility of tourism venue (i.e., stairs or lift access) and its offering be available online, but there should be a contact number to call the tourism operator for clarification and confirmation.
- Access to authentic information is also important, for example, being able to read the reviews of other access visitors or watch a short video of the experience (real people doing real access).

- Information should be provided in different formats, for instance, audio or written, to cater for different individual needs. As an example, for people with cognitive and learning disabilities, should be easy read and upper case is often difficult to read. As a further example, for people with visual disabilities, extra-large signage is difficult to read, and colour should be well contrasted. Screen readers are not able to read PDFs, or anything placed in a box, like a map or diagram.
- It would be beneficial to have a 'one-stop-shop' at a destination hosted by the Regional Tourism Organisation. This 'one-stop-shop' should include links to relevant access organisations (i.e., for equipment hire) and identify and promote accessible tourism operators in the region.

"The accuracy and availability of information is so crucial - If somebody came down for the weekend, and then all of a sudden couldn't have access to a wheelchair, and they were reliant on one, and they've flown down – they had Air New Zealand provide a wheelchair to get them on the plane and off the plane, it would waste a whole weekend, because they wouldn't be able to get around. So, being able to book those sorts of things, and know reliably that there is a wheelchair at that venue for you... To know – how easy is it getting wheelchair accessible transport from the airport to town? Now, in the day, where your flights can change, at a moment's notice."

Awareness

Another key aspect the participants raised was the importance of awareness.

Figure 4 Awareness

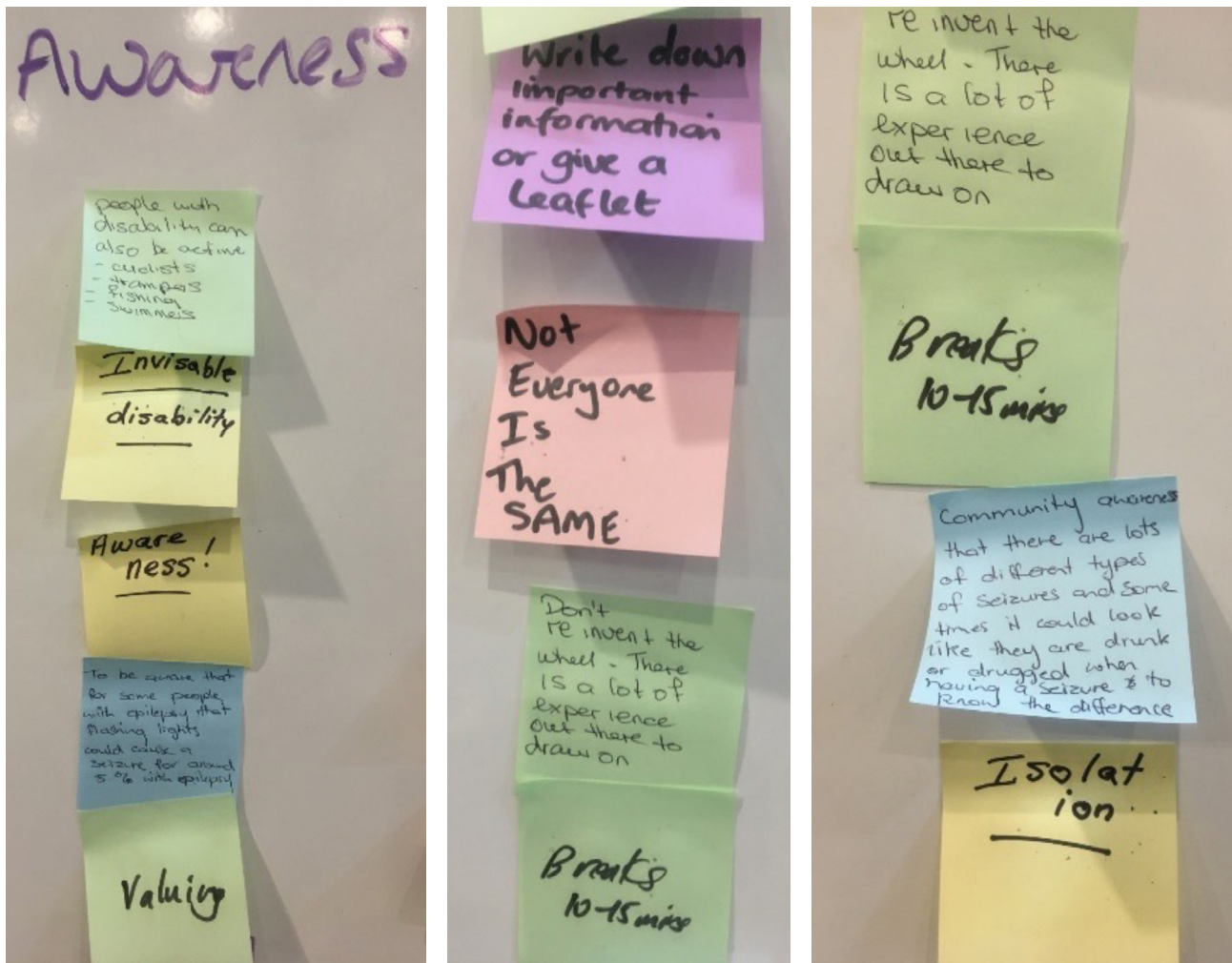


Table 3 Awareness

Awareness
• Awareness
• Be patient and kind.
• Valuing.
• Awareness.
• Not everyone is the same.
• Invisible disability.
• Community awareness that there are lots of different types of seizures – and sometimes it could look like they are drunk or drugged when having a seizure – and to know the difference.
• To be aware that for some people with epilepsy, flashing lights could cause a seizure for around 5% of people with epilepsy.
• People with disability can also be active (e.g., cycle, tramp, fish, swim).
• Assistive dogs.
• Breaks – 10 to 15 minutes.
• Isolation.

Tourism operators need to realise that they are potentially missing out on 25-30% of the market by not providing access and inclusion. The workshop participants raised the following points:

- Access is a basic human right, and good access works for everyone. Tourism operators seem to forget that the access visitor has just as much money to spend as anyone else.
 - Tourism operators need to be aware of assistance dogs and the importance of them. A person will usually make it known – if it is not already obvious – that a dog is an assistance dog. A general rule of thumb is if a dog is in a harness, they are working, so do not pat or feed them and if they are not harnessed, a person could ask permission to pat or feed them.
 - Tourism operators need to be aware of disability-related equipment, and its handling and operation, for example, how to fold up a wheelchair correctly.
- There is a diversity of disability, and many disabilities are invisible. There needs to be an awareness of this. For example:
 - For people with intellectual disabilities, breaks to rest are important, some additional support might be required when navigating unfamiliar environments, and mobility can sometimes be an issue.
 - For people with hearing impairments, certain volumes can be tiring, as can the effects of an echo or acoustics.
 - For people with epilepsy, flashing lights and dry ice can cause seizures. There are many different types of seizures, and tourism operators need an awareness of this, and to have done a first aid course to recognise a seizure and act accordingly. People with epilepsy cannot drive for 12 months after a seizure, so transportation can be an issue.
 - Venture Taranaki can partner with access stakeholders in the region to increase awareness and engagement with disability, access and inclusion by the tourism sector.





Communication

A key aspect the participants raised was the importance of communication.

Figure 5 Communication

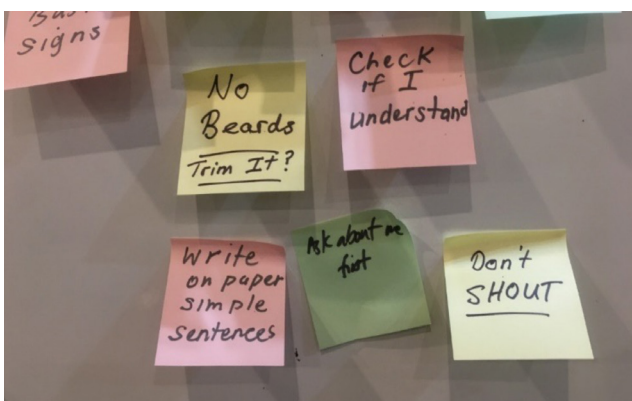
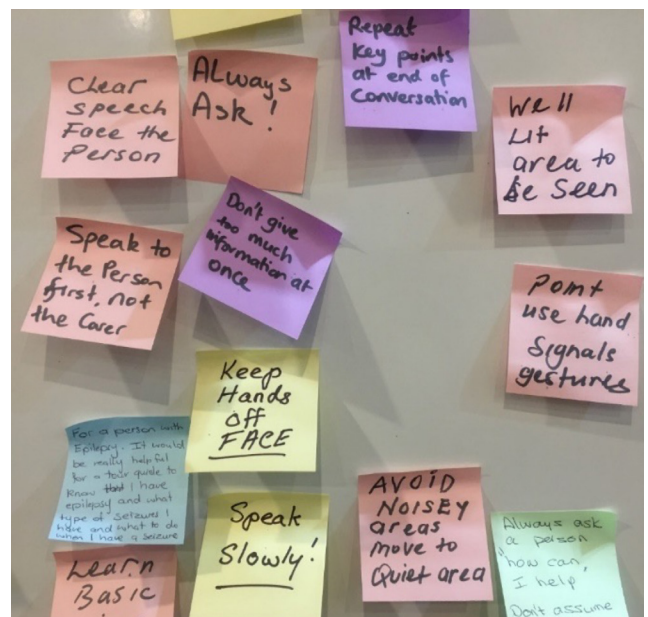
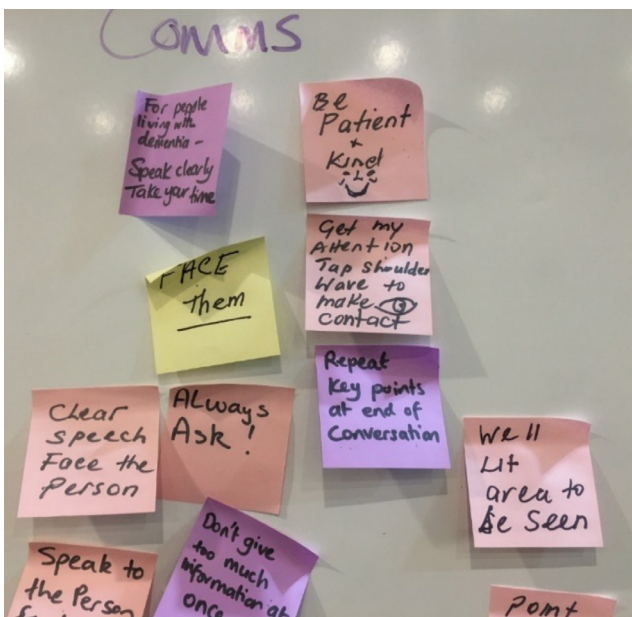


Table 4 Communication

Communication
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Get my attention – tap shoulder or wave to make eye contact.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Speak to the person first, not the carer.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ask about me first.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Always ask.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Always ask a person, "how can I help?" – don't assume.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• For a person with epilepsy, it would be really helpful for a tour guide to know that I have epilepsy and what types of seizures I have, and what to do when I have a seizure.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Well-lit area to be seen.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Avoid noisy areas – move to a quiet area.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Face them.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Face the person.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• No beards – trim it?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Keep hands off face.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Don't use hand signals or gestures.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Learn basic signs.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Don't shout.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Clear speech.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• For people living with dementia – speak clearly and take your time.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Speak slowly.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Check if I understand.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Don't give too much information at once.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Repeat key points at end of conversation.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Write on paper simple sentences.

Communication plays a fundamental role in providing a warm welcome to the access visitor. The workshop participants raised the following points:

- Language matters. When talking to the access visitor, refer to them first, rather than their carer or companion, and if known, use their name.
- The access visitor is the expert, not the person they are travelling with. It is important to ask a person what they would like, rather than presume what they would like, and if there is a group travelling together, then a conversation can be had about any access requirements.
- When communicating with the access visitor, face them directly, and speak clearly.
 - When communicating with a person with a hearing impairment, make yourself visible and position yourself in good lighting with minimal background sound, face the person so that they can lip read or watch your body language, speak slowly and clearly without shouting. Learning the basics of New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL) is encouraged, but at a minimum, websites and the NZSL app provide useful words, phrases and other information. If all else fails, written communication can be utilised.
 - When communicating with a person with vision impairment, large font size (above 12 points) with good colour contrast is key.
- Older people might not have phones, or phones with smart phones or data, so loan phones are a useful option.
- The access visitor may not trust the use of accessibility symbols, if they do not perceive the tourism operator as understanding what they mean or being able to deliver on them. For example, the International Symbol for Deafness indicates the availability of hearing technology, a hearing loop, or a staff member who can sign.

"Sometimes it's even having a user-friendly counter, you know? You go in as someone that's a wheelchair user, they'll pull up, and the counter is way up here. So, it's nice if a business can actually include a lower counter, and then they can interact at that level, pull up a chair."

Advice to tourism operators

In this section, we present what the workshop participants wanted tourism operators to know about providing access and inclusion to the access visitor.

Figure 6 Advice to tourism operators

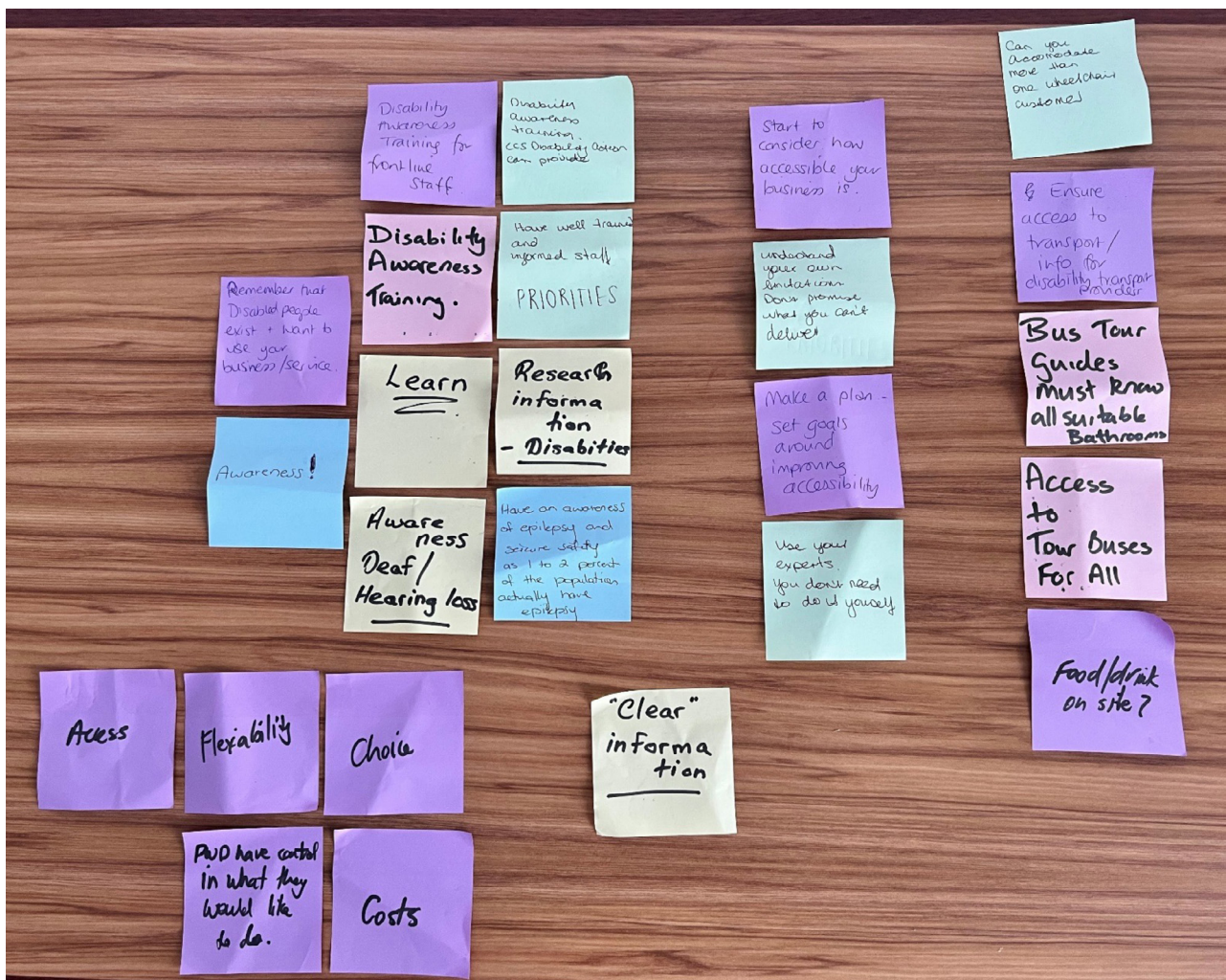




Table 5 Advice to tourism operators

Advice to tourism operators
• Learn.
• Research information on disability.
• Have well-trained and informed staff.
• Disability awareness training.
• Disability awareness training (CCS Disability Action can provide).
• Disability awareness training for frontline staff.
• Awareness of deaf and hearing loss.
• Have an awareness of epilepsy and seizure safety, as 1-2% of the population actually have epilepsy.
• People with disabilities exist and want to use your business/service.
• People with disabilities have control in what they would like to do.
• Choice.
• Flexibility.
• Costs.
• Concessions.
• Food and drink on-site.
• Clear information.
• Access.
• Start to consider how accessible your [operators] business is.
• Understand your limitations – don't promise what you can't deliver.
• Don't reinvent the wheel – there is a lot of experience out there to draw on.
• Use your experts – you don't need to do it yourself.
• Can you accommodate more than one wheelchair customer.
• Make a plan – set goals around improving accessibility.
• Plans for access are important as access.
• Ensure access to transport/information for disability transport providers.
• Access to tour buses for all.
• Bus tour guides must know all suitable bathrooms.



There are several actions tourism operators can take to provide access and inclusion to the access visitor. The workshop participants raised the following points:

- Disability awareness training courses make people more empathetic. Both **CCS Disability Action** and the **Taranaki Disabilities Information Centre**, for instance, provide them online, in person, or tailored to groups. Training should not be treated as a one-off as knowledge can be lost with staff turnover.
- Tourism operators should engage with access organisations to gain advice on how to improve the experience for the access visitor. CCS Disability Action can also provide audits and usability studies that can be tailored to different sized organisations.
- The **Taranaki Disabilities Information Centre** is a one-stop-shop, where the access visitor can book reliable equipment for hire, for example, a wheelchair or mobility scooter. Equipment hire is also something tourism operators could consider offering themselves. Tourism operators should be mindful when handling people's equipment, for instance, folding a wheelchair correctly.
- The accessible journey is so important.
- Tourism operators are encouraged to be flexible and 'think outside the box'.
- Tourism operators could provide short videos of the access visitor navigating a particular experience, or journey throughout the region to show real life people doing real life things.
- In terms of incentives, tourism operators could provide different opening hours or a 'quiet time' or offer free entry or concessions for carers, for example, the Hapai Access Card. Packages could also be provided, for instance, short- or respite-breaks.
- Local tourism operators that the workshop participants felt were doing good work in terms of accessibility, included Brooklands Zoo and TSB Showplace.
- Displaying access symbols, audits or awards does not necessarily mean a tourism operator is accessible.
- Accessibility charters and policies are becoming increasingly common. They signify an intent and commitment to have a fully accessible organisation at some point and set out what accessibility they can currently provide for. While this may feel daunting initially, they signal an intention to do better. Having an accessibility charter or policy would mean a tourism operator is 'a step ahead of the game,' considering proposed legislation on accessibility and an access sector wide move to introduce accessibility charters. The **Ministry of Social Development** and **Arts Access Aotearoa** have examples of this.



Recommendations

In this section, we present recommendations based on how workshop participants wanted to see Taranaki become the most accessible and inclusive destination. In this section, we summarise their recommendations for tourism operators in the region.

Recommendations for tourism operators

Based on the information provided in this report, the following top 10 tips are recommended for tourism operators to increase access and inclusion in the region:

- 1. Train staff to be well-informed – reach out to local providers for disability awareness training and knowledge of support services and available equipment.**

Disability is diverse and can be invisible. It is important staff are disability aware and know how to handle and operate accessibility equipment. You don't need to do it yourself – online and in person disability awareness training is available from local providers, such as the **Taranaki Disabilities Information Centre** and **CCS Disability Action**.

- 2. Provide a warm welcome – know what assistance the access visitor may need and how to communicate with them.**

Language matters – talk to the access visitor in the same way as you would everyone else. Speak clearly and face directly to the access visitor, even if they have a companion or interpreter with them – do not shout. Always ask how you can help, don't assume – they know their needs best. Provide accessible ways for them to give feedback and respond to their comments promptly. Always welcome assistance dogs.

- 3. Accommodate safety – ask every access visitor if they require any assistance with evacuation in an emergency.**

A key concern of the access visitor, particularly people who are Deaf or hard of hearing, is safe evacuation. Make a plan to manage health, safety and risk, especially during an emergency.

- 4. Assess the physical environment – know what physical features may pose barriers.**

Ensure your venue has minimal physical barriers and hazards. Highlight your accessible features, facilities and services. This will include accessible parking, toilets and change places, and rooms, a direct route to the main entrance or reception, high contrast décor and lighting, clear and well-placed signage and wayfinding. Consider assessing for sensory sensitivity and provide a quiet space and seating at regular intervals.

5. Ensure information and interpretation is in accessible formats – the access visitor will plan and engage in different ways.

Ensure your website meets accessibility standards and are compatible with assistive technologies, for instance, screen readers. Follow guidance from New Zealand's **Ministry of Social Development** or **Visit Britain**, and make sure your web designer follows best practice, for example, **WCAG**. Make sure information is available in alternative accessible formats, for instance, audio, Braille, large print, easy-read, sub-titles, and New Zealand Sign Language.

6. Provide clear, accurate and up-to-date information on the accessibility of your business – the access visitor needs to know what to expect and will want to plan their travel.

Consider having a dedicated section or statement on your website about the accessibility of your venue and offering so that the access visitor can assess their individual needs. Trustworthy information is important, and the access visitor might want a direct contact for clarification or confirmation. Show real people doing real things and promote feedback from other access visitors.

7. Offer incentives and concessions – the access visitor and their companions are a growing market that are loyal, stay longer and spend more.

Consider incentives, concessions and packages that will encourage the access visitor and their travel companions to experience your business, for example, free entry for carers, special opening hours, quiet times, or respite breaks. Promote these incentives on your website and at the venue.

8. Help with the journey – connect with and promote other accessible tourism operators.

Even if your business is accessible, an access visitor may still experience barriers within the destination and getting to and from your venue. Be ready to advise on other aspects of their journey – research the accessibility of local public transport and other tourism operators.

9. Destination 'one-stop-shop' – centralise information for the access visitor.

The access visitor finds journey planning easier when information is available centrally in a 'one-stop-shop' at a destination. Look for opportunities to feature on such websites and promote your accessibility; this may be with access organisations as well as tourism bodies.

10. Accessibility charter – set goals and plan to improve, promote and monitor your access.

Consider creating an accessibility charter to signify your intent and commitment to have a fully accessible business at some point, while setting out a statement of what accessibility you currently provide for. Examples of these include the **New Zealand Ministry of Social Development**, **Arts Access Aotearoa** and **Visit Britain**.

Top 10 tips for accessible and inclusive tourism

1

Train staff to be well-informed.

Reach out to local providers for disability awareness training and knowledge of support services and available equipment.

2

Provide a warm welcome.

Know what assistance the access visitor may need and how to communicate with them.

3

Accommodate safety.

Ask every access visitor if they require any assistance with evacuation in an emergency.

4

Assess the physical environment.

Know what physical features may cause barriers.

5

Ensure information and interpretation is in accessible formats.

The access visitor will plan and engage in different ways.

6

Provide clear, accurate, and up-to-date information on the accessibility of your business.

The access visitor needs to know what to expect and will want to plan.

7

Offer incentives and concessions.

The access visitor and their companions are a growing market that are loyal, stay longer, and spend more.

8

Help with the journey.

Connect with and promote other tourism operators.

9

Destination 'one-stop-shop'.

Centralise information for the access visitor.

10

Accessibility charter.

Set goals and plan to improve, promote, and monitor your access.



ABOUT VENTURE TARANAKI

Venture Taranaki is the regional development agency for Taranaki. The organisation is responsible for regional development strategy, enterprise and sector development, investment and people attraction, and major project initiatives which contribute to the inclusive and sustainable growth of the region. Venture Taranaki is a registered charitable trust and a New Plymouth District Council Controlled Organisation, supported by the three District Councils of the Taranaki region.

venture
TARANAKI
Te Puna Umanga

25 Dawson Street, PO Box 670
New Plymouth 4340, New Zealand

T+64 6 759 5150
E info@venture.org.nz

venture.org.nz