

# Information and Orientation Guidelines for Disability Support Workers in Post Secondary Education and Training

## Contents

Section One: Introduction.....	3
Post Secondary education and training.....	3
Universities.....	4
Institutes of Tertiary and Further Education (TAFE).....	4
Impairments, disabilities and handicaps.....	4
Disability support services.....	6
The seven principles of the Disability Services Act (1986).....	7
Who is involved?.....	8
Students with disabilities.....	8
Disability Practitioners.....	8
Teaching staff.....	9
Administrative staff.....	9
Disability support workers.....	9
Section Two: Disability support work.....	10
Who is the employer?.....	10
General selection criteria.....	11
Applying for a DSW position.....	11
Accepting a position.....	11
Induction and orientation.....	12
Induction meeting.....	12
Orientation and in-house training.....	12

## **Information and Orientation Guidelines for Disability Support Workers in Post Secondary Education and Training**

---

Trial period .....	13
Pay and conditions .....	13
General role and responsibilities .....	13
Feedback and liaison .....	14
Ill health .....	15
Cancellations .....	15
Absence and lateness .....	15
Task boundaries .....	16
Inappropriate activities .....	16
Section Three: Specific position descriptions .....	18
Attendant carer .....	18
Interpreter .....	21
Mobility guide .....	22
Notetaker .....	24
Participation assistant .....	27
Personal assistant .....	28
Reader .....	29
Tutor .....	30
Section Four: Interacting with clients .....	31
Clients with hearing impairments .....	32
Clients with an intellectual disability .....	34
Clients with chronic medical conditions .....	36
Clients with mental health problems .....	36
Clients with neurological impairments .....	38
Clients with physical/motor impairments .....	39
Clients with speech/communication difficulties .....	40
Clients with vision impairments .....	42
Section Five: Performance evaluation .....	43
General grounds for warning or termination .....	44
Complaints .....	44
Job dissatisfaction .....	46
Resignation .....	46

## **Information and Orientation Guidelines for Disability Support Workers in Post Secondary Education and Training**

---

Exit interview .....	46
Employment agreement .....	46
Appendices .....	47
Appendix I: Personal attributes and performance evaluation checklists .....	47
Acknowledgments .....	49
References .....	50

### **Section One: Introduction**

These Guidelines were developed to offer pointers to good practice for Disability Support Workers (DSWs) working with students with disabilities in the tertiary education and training environment. The authors suggest that the guidelines should be read in conjunction with relevant policies and procedures in force in each tertiary institution. The guidelines may also be useful to students with disabilities and Disability Practitioners responsible for evaluating the performance of DSWs.

The need for such guidelines was made clear by the results of a survey of students with disabilities receiving disability support services and other research into accepted practice. There was a perceived need to clarify different roles within the broad descriptor of 'disability support worker' and to set out the attitudes and behaviours demonstrated and boundaries adhered to by effective DSWs. The rationale behind this approach was threefold.

First, that students with disabilities, or clients, needed a clear understanding of what to expect from DSWs.

Second, that DSWs who comprehend the importance of their role and how to perform well will be more comfortable in the tertiary environment and, therefore, more effective.

Third, it was held that, if this understanding was increased, clients would receive from DSWs more appropriate higher quality support services throughout their tertiary education and training experience.

### **Post Secondary education and training**

The post secondary education and training environment is made up of two kinds of institutions: universities and institutes of TAFE. In Victoria, there have been a number of mergers between universities and multi-campus TAFE institutes and, thus, the distinction between the two has become blurred.

## **Information and Orientation Guidelines for Disability Support Workers in Post Secondary Education and Training**

---

### **Universities**

Most Universities in Australia are funded by the Commonwealth Government and are therefore subject primarily to Commonwealth Government education and training policies. Universities are semi-autonomous institutions whose educational services are based on a lecture and exam tradition dating back to the sixteenth century. The University of Paris claims to be the oldest university with Oxford University being established later in the 1590s. Universities can award Degrees for the completion of a course of study at a required standard over 3, or up to 6, years full time. Academic staff at universities are selected from amongst the highest performing people in research, academic studies and specific professions but, generally, they have no training in teaching except that which they have experienced as students themselves. The majority of academic staff have had little experience in working with students with disabilities and are often not aware of the role of disability support workers.

### **Institutes of Tertiary and Further Education (TAFE)**

Institutes of TAFE are funded by the State Government and are therefore subject primarily to State Government education and training policies. They too are semi-autonomous institutions whose educational services are based more on a practical industrial training model dating back to nineteenth century English workers' institutes and early Australian 'technical' education. TAFE institutes do not award Degrees in their own right. Instead they offer Certificates and Diplomas for the successful completion of courses of study over weeks (short courses) or up to 2 years full time study. TAFE teaching staff are selected from amongst the highest quality practitioners in professional, industrial and technical spheres. Generally, few teachers in TAFE institutes have teacher training either. Therefore, while they may have been exposed to different forms of teaching, perhaps through an apprenticeship, they have no more experience in working with students with disabilities or disability support workers.

### **Impairments, disabilities and handicaps**

The World Health Organisation (WHO) makes a clear distinction between 'impairment', 'disability' and 'handicap' - three words which are often confused or used interchangeably - incorrectly.

According to the WHO, the word disability describes the impact of any physical, sensory (hearing and vision), neurological, intellectual, speech or psychological impairment a person may have. Impairments are usually permanent or long-term present from birth or acquired during life as a result of an injury or illness. For example, a child may be born with severe spina bifida and start using a wheelchair very early in life. In another case, a fit and healthy teenager may have been involved in a

## **Information and Orientation Guidelines for Disability Support Workers in Post Secondary Education and Training**

---

sporting accident during which their spinal cord was damaged in the lumbar region. The resulting paralysis is an impairment of the person's usual body function. One of the consequences of these impairments is that the people concerned cannot walk. The disability in these cases is the inability to walk but a wheelchair helps people to get around. Of course, in many situations such as listening to classical music or using a computer, people in these circumstances probably do not have a disability but still have impairments. A handicap only arises when some external barrier is in the way, say, of people using wheelchairs - like steps at the front of a building or the lack of accessible toilets or taxis. These are environmental and economic handicaps which really make living difficult at times for people with physical impairments.

Other sorts of impairments are associated with different disabilities and give rise to different handicaps. For example, handicaps in tertiary education and training could arise from, say, an administrative or teaching decision like making computer usage mandatory for all students. For people with a vision impairment whose disability is that they cannot see/ read the screen, such a decision creates a potential handicap with regard to access to education and future earning capacity. In these instances, the possibility of a handicap emerging is reduced by the purchase and installation of screen enhancement or voice synthesis software programs.

The need to communicate provides another example of how people with disabilities are handicapped. Up to a few years ago people who are deaf could not use the regular telephone system with the result that they had no ready access to emergency services. They were also isolated in many respects from friends and the general community.

Communication issues are still far from resolved for people who are deaf but, now, more hearing people are learning Auslan sign language, public services are installing telephone typewriters (TTYs), most businesses have faxes, the TTY Relay Service is available 24 hours a day and, of course, there is the Internet.

Access to information is yet another concern. Placing only print materials in a library can create a handicap for people who have neurological or vision impairments. Their disability may be that they cannot read print (ie. books, papers, signs, forms) and, without the provision of audio-taped articles and books or a DSW Reader, such people are severely handicapped when it comes to access to information, educational opportunities and future earning capacity. These are examples of technological and, perhaps, budget-based handicaps that many students with impairments are faced with.

## **Information and Orientation Guidelines for Disability Support Workers in Post Secondary Education and Training**

---

As indicated above, there are various broad categories of disability. These guidelines use a set of eight which appears to cover most impairments and chronic medical conditions:

- Hearing
- Intellectual
- Medical
- Neurological
- Physical
- Psychiatric
- Speech/Communication
- Vision

Each of these categories encompasses many different impairments and conditions - almost as many as there are people with 'disabilities'. For example, a physical disability may include: paraplegia, cerebral palsy and limb amputation while a psychiatric disability covers phobias, severe depression and/or anxiety and schizophrenias. Neurological disabilities encompass acquired brain injury, learning disabilities (e.g. dyslexia, dyscalculia, dysphasia, dysgraphia) and attention deficit disorder. Medical disabilities include many different conditions and illnesses such as cancer, arthritis, cystic fibrosis, multiple sclerosis, muscular dystrophy, fibromyalgia, chronic fatigue syndrome, HIV and epilepsy.

Some, but not all, students from different disability groups need support and assistance in the tertiary education and training environment. Students with disabilities who receive or consume disability support services of any kind are referred to here as 'clients'.

More information about the nature and degree of impairments within these disability categories and suggestions as to how to work best with clients with these sorts of disabilities is provided in Section Four of the guidelines *Interacting with clients*.

### **Disability support services**

The term disability support services usually refers to a wide range of services, facilities and adaptive equipment provided by a university or institute of TAFE to assist students with disabilities to achieve their educational goals.

## **Information and Orientation Guidelines for Disability Support Workers in Post Secondary Education and Training**

---

Disability support services in Australia have increased greatly over the past few years as more people with disabilities consider tertiary education and training to be a realistic option. People have been encouraged in this pursuit by equal opportunity legislation passed initially by the States through the 1980s and the seven important principles set by the Commonwealth Government in Disabilities Services Act of (1986).

### **The seven principles of the Disability Services Act (1986)**

Persons with disabilities are individuals who have the inherent right to respect for their human worth and dignity.

Persons with disabilities, whatever the origin, nature, type and degree of disability have the same fundamental right as all members of Australian society.

Every person with a disability has the same rights as other members of Australian society to realise his or her individual capacity for physical, social, emotional and intellectual development.

Persons with disabilities have the same rights as other members of Australian society to services which will support their attaining an acceptable quality of life.

Persons with disabilities have the same rights as other members of Australian society to participate in the decisions which will affect their lives.

Persons with disabilities have the same rights as other members of Australian society to the least restrictive alternative in the services they receive.

Persons with disabilities have the same rights of pursuit of any grievance as have other members of Australian society in relation to the services which they receive.

Later, the Commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act 1992, known as the DDA, made it illegal for tertiary institutions to discriminate against people with disabilities (ie. create handicaps) by:

- refusing to enrol a person with a disability in their courses because of, and only because of, that disability;
- expelling enrolled students because of a disability; or
- failing to provide appropriate support services, facilities and adaptive equipment unless such provision would cause the institution "undue hardship".

This means that people with disabilities anywhere in Australia have the same right to receive opportunities to participate in tertiary education and training as people without disabilities. Some institutions have attempted, and probably will continue, to claim undue hardship with regard to providing appropriate facilities, adaptive equipment and

## **Information and Orientation Guidelines for Disability Support Workers in Post Secondary Education and Training**

---

disability support services. However, as case law under the DDA builds up, it will be seen that this law, as it stands, sets the 'undue hardship' bar very high. The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) will excuse few institutions from making reasonable adjustments and providing support services for students with disabilities.

Contrary to popular opinion, 'equal opportunity' does not necessarily mean being treated the same as everyone else. In fact, equal opportunities may mean receiving additional assistance in order to be able to do the same things that other people usually do. Students with disabilities still have to use their own intellectual and/or creative abilities to achieve their educational goals and they have to prove that they can achieve what is required by a course just the same as other students do - even if they do it with a little practical help or a little more time.

These guidelines focus on the aspect of disability support services delivered by trained and experienced people - disability support workers.

### **Who is involved?**

The five most important groups involved in disability support services in post secondary education are students with disabilities, disability support services staff, teaching staff, administrative staff and, of course, disability support workers.

### **Students with disabilities**

Students with disabilities or clients are enrolled students (school-leavers or adults returning to study). Many but not all students with disabilities need and/or receive disability support services because they require assistance with the everyday tasks expected of tertiary students. In order to be eligible for disability support services, students usually need to register and have their needs assessed by a disability practitioner in the institution's Student Support/ Services Office.

### **Disability Practitioners**

Disability practitioners should be the first people to be contacted by students with disabilities who require assistance in the post secondary environment. These staff are variously known as Disability Liaison Officers; Disability Advisers; Integration Co-ordinators; Teacher Consultants, Disability Support Officers and the like. For ease of identification throughout these guidelines, they will be referred to, generally, as disability practitioners.

## **Information and Orientation Guidelines for Disability Support Workers in Post Secondary Education and Training**

---

Disability Practitioners are responsible for assessing the needs of students for disability support services in relation to teaching (e.g. class or lab work), learning (e.g. library , workshop) and assessment (essays, reports or exams) and organising support services for clients. Often the latter task involves recruiting and selecting DSWs, making alternative arrangements for exams and liaising with teaching staff.

### **Teaching staff**

Teaching in post secondary education usually involves working with large classes of students where there is not the same potential for getting to know individual students as in secondary education. Teachers or academic staff can play a very important part in supporting students with disabilities by modifying teaching techniques (e.g. always facing the class so that students who are hard of hearing can read their lips or repeating information in a different way to assist students with learning disabilities); having an approachable manner; making themselves available for consultations outside class; and authorising alternative forms of assessment or extensions of time in which to complete work. Teaching staff can also assist by providing reading lists well in advance of the beginning of term and, perhaps, indicating which resources are the most important in a given subject.

### **Administrative staff**

Administrative staff range from Directors, Vice-Chancellors and Heads of Departments to librarians, library assistants, receptionists, lab technicians, workshop and technical assistants and computer support people. Administrative staff should be just as conscious of the need to ensure equal access to the institution's facilities and services for students with disabilities. They too can play a vital role in assisting individual students with disabilities perhaps by helping the student to fill out a form or reading out a pamphlet which is not available in Braille. This may involve providing a little more support or spending a little more time with students with disabilities - the first time.

### **Disability support workers**

DSWs are the most important group in making sure that students with disabilities can participate as fully as possible in the tertiary education and training environment. The presence of DSWs frequently makes the difference between students with disabilities succeeding in their education and training goals or dropping out.

Disability support workers or DSWs are appropriately qualified and trained individuals employed in one or more of a number of specific roles which exist to provide support

## **Information and Orientation Guidelines for Disability Support Workers in Post Secondary Education and Training**

---

and assistance for students with disabilities in the post secondary environment. Eight of these roles are described in Section Three.

### **Section Two: Disability support work**

The Disability support worker role has a number of different dimensions with different titles which include note-taker, scribe, class participation assistant, integration aide, reader, library assistant, personal carer, attendant, attendant carer, personal assistant, mobility and orientation guide, coach and tutor. These guidelines will focus on the positions of attendant carers, personal assistants, note-takers, mobility and orientation guides, readers and tutors.

Sign language interpreters are included in this broad descriptor because they also provide support for students who cannot benefit from existing education and training opportunities because of an impairment - loss of hearing. However, the information provided here about the role of interpreters is offered only in order to broaden the awareness of other DSWs. Interpreters, through their professional body the Australian Sign Language Interpreters' Association (ASLIA) have their own occupational health and safety guidelines and code of ethics (<http://www.aslia.com.au/national/policies.htm>). It is also acknowledged that deaf signing students may not regard their inclusion amongst the recipients of disability support services as appropriate but this issue is best addressed in another forum.

### **Who is the employer?**

Some DSWs are employed by the post secondary institution itself and others are employed by agencies which provide DSWs under some sort of contract to the institution. There are a number of variations on these two arrangements. In the former instance, the disability practitioners usually has the power to hire and fire DSWs under the human resources policies of the institution. In the latter, if a DSW is unable to fulfil the role satisfactorily, the disability practitioner may indicate to the agency that that particular DSW is to be replaced. In some instances, a student with a disability or client is a sort of supervisor. The client is entitled to discuss the performance or attitude of a DSW with the disability practitioner and changes may ensue.

As a newly appointed DSW, the following usually applies:

Employer = institution (or agency through the institution)

Manager = disability practitioner

Supervisor = student with a disability with whom the DSW works.

## **Information and Orientation Guidelines for Disability Support Workers in Post Secondary Education and Training**

---

### **General selection criteria**

The various roles within the DSW field will differ with regard to the qualifications and training required and position descriptions for the same sort of job may differ from institution to institution. These are the sorts of qualities needed in any DSW job:

- strong interpersonal, communication and organisational skills
- a genuine commitment to providing unobtrusive support to assist students with disabilities to achieve their goals
- awareness of and respect for the rights of students with disabilities; and
- the ability to provide support while facilitating independence and self-determination.
- 

### **Applying for a DSW position**

Basic tips about how to apply for the position of a DSW

- investigate fully what a DSW does generally e.g. speak to someone who is in a DSW job now or ask at the Disability practitioners Office. Make sure there is a match between your goals and skills and the duties, knowledge and attitudes required by the job of a DSW;
- find out about the particular DSW position on offer (ie. be clear whether it is a notetaker's position or whatever) and about the institution (ie. get hold of the position description for the job from the disability practitioner as well as copies of any relevant policies and procedures which are relevant to this job);
- complete an application form and go for an employment interview with the disability practitioner (and, hopefully, the student with a disability with whom this DSW will work) setting out your understanding of what is required and how well your skills, training and experience fit the criteria. Also, ask questions to make sure you have the full picture;
- wait for a decision about whether you get the position or not.

### **Accepting a position**

Perhaps, when so many people need to take whatever employment is offered to them, it may seem silly to suggest that prospective DSWs should think carefully about whether to accept a DSW position. However, it is important to do this and to be quite confident that the position will suit. This is because, if things break down, a student with a disability may be quite seriously disadvantaged when they lose their DSW mid-way through a semester.

## **Information and Orientation Guidelines for Disability Support Workers in Post Secondary Education and Training**

---

### **Induction and orientation**

Induction and orientation is vitally important in this field because, while the DSW has been employed to provide part of a specialised support services program for a student with a disability and, no doubt the DSW has the required qualifications and experience, the precise nature of the 'part' and how it is to be carried out depend on the needs of an individual client. Therefore, the precise details of the position cannot be known until the induction and orientation stage.

### **Induction meeting**

Immediately after appointment to a DSW position, it is valuable to meet with the disability practitioner at which time general and specific aspects of the position are discussed and agreed upon. It is also very important that the client with whom a DSW will be working is involved when addressing particular matters e.g. the client's particular needs and the rights and responsibilities of all parties. When a tri-party meeting occurs everyone knows what everyone else said about a matter and there is less room for any misunderstanding in the future.

If the disability practitioner does not offer a meeting like this, it would be wise for the new DSW to request one.

### **Orientation and in-house training**

It is important the new DSW is shown around the environment in which they will work (including toilets and kitchens etc) and introduced to most of the teaching and administrative staff with whom they will come in contact. The disability practitioner or the client can do this. Attendance by DSWs at any campus orientation or library tours is also recommended strongly, especially if the incumbent is unfamiliar with the particular campus or its facilities.

Some employers provide general DSW or specific (e.g. Note-taking) in-house training. In house training may be delivered by the disability practitioner, someone else within the institution or by a consultant from outside the institution. If such training is offered it may be paid or voluntary.

## **Information and Orientation Guidelines for Disability Support Workers in Post Secondary Education and Training**

---

### **Trial period**

It is useful strategy for all involved to regard the first three weeks as a trial period in which to have timetables settle down and to ensure the disability practitioner, client and DSW are all satisfied with the working arrangements.

### **Pay and conditions**

If all parties are satisfied at the end of the trial period, the DSW should be confirmed in the position or formally hired for the duration of the agreed employment period.

Rates of pay for DSW positions will depend upon the level of qualifications and experience required. Rates of pay for the same sort of DSW role may also differ markedly between institutions. The disability practitioner will inform DSWs of the rate per hour at the time of appointment but they are entitled to clarify this matter earlier during the employment interview.

DSWs are usually employed as temporary staff or under short term casual contracts (e.g. for 16 weeks or 10 months) according to the human resources policies and procedures of the employing institution. It is important to note that 'casual' employment means that annual and extended sick leave are already built into the hourly rate. Therefore, in effect, no work usually means no pay.

DSWs are usually paid according to validated pay sheets claiming that a particular number of hours were worked in a pay period (usually 2 weeks). It is the responsibility of each DSW to ensure that their claim/pay sheets are filled in correctly and delivered to the appropriate office on time.

If DSWs have concerns about pay and conditions they can discuss them with the DLO or contact the human resources department about the institution's workplace agreement.

### **General role and responsibilities**

DSWs are employed to fulfill the role of an unobtrusive deliverer of specific support services and assistance to post secondary students with disabilities (clients) who are undertaking academic, training and some daily living tasks on campus.

DSWs are responsible for delivering the highest quality support services and assistance possible (given their qualifications and experience and the induction, orientation and

## **Information and Orientation Guidelines for Disability Support Workers in Post Secondary Education and Training**

---

training made available by the employing institution); and, thereby, maximising their client's participation in the post secondary environment.

DSWs are also responsible for treating clients, their decisions and their choices with respect; encouraging a sense of independence, autonomy and positive self-esteem, and honouring the client's rights to dignity, privacy and confidentiality. The catch-words are: 'unobtrusive', 'specific', 'respectful', while facilitating the development and maintenance of 'independence', 'positive self-esteem', 'dignity', 'privacy', and 'confidentiality'.

### **Other general responsibilities when working with clients include:**

- Punctuality: be on time for all commitments and appointments;
- Accuracy: be as accurate as possible. The client will be disadvantaged by your mistakes;
- Staying out of it: always encourage direct communication between teaching staff and the client;
- Advising in advance: if you are unable to attend a class, inform the client and the disability practitioner at least 24 hours in advance;
- Aiming for continuous improvement in your performance: follow your client's instructions, seek feedback from them about their level of satisfaction with your job performance and be prepared to accept criticism.
- 

### **Feedback and liaison**

While clients are sort of supervisors of the DSW role, there are times when a DSW's responsibilities will include giving the disability practitioner feedback on progress and any circumstances which may threaten the provision of disability support services to a particular client. Therefore, DSWs may be asked to:

- Discuss with the disability practitioner any knowledge they may have about cheating, plagiarising or other falsification of their work by a client. It is the responsibility of the disability practitioner to consider the matter and decide whether to take it further with teaching or administrative staff.
- Report to the disability practitioner if a client steals from, or abuses (verbally or physically), or sexually harasses, the DSW or anyone else.
- Record any absences or regular late arrivals by the client.
- Inform the client that this sort of feedback and liaison will occur.

## **Information and Orientation Guidelines for Disability Support Workers in Post Secondary Education and Training**

---

### **Ill health**

In the event that a DSW is unable to attend one or more sessions due to their own ill health, the DSW should inform the disability practitioner and/or the client as soon as possible. The matter of payment while the DSW is ill will be dealt with according to the human resources policies of the institution. Most of these are likely to require a medical certificate for absences due to ill health of more than one or two days.

The disability practitioner will endeavour to replace the DSW for the period advised but, otherwise, the DSW should only be replaced at the request of one of the three parties to the original induction meeting (see also Unsatisfactory Performance and Resignation below).

### **Cancellations**

Teaching staff, administrative staff, the disability practitioner or the client, may bring about cancellations of classes and other commitments. The disability practitioner or client should let you know about cancellations of classes or changes in arrangements in time to prevent you from leaving what you are doing to start work - usually at least 24 hours. If this does not occur you are entitled to request payment for at least part of the time you would have worked.

### **Absence and lateness**

In the event you are unable to attend a session, or a number of consecutive sessions, you must inform the disability practitioner and/or the client as soon as possible. Remember that clients depend upon DSW reliability and therefore disability practitioner need the maximum amount of notice in order to find a replacement. Regardless of the reason for absence, whether illness or otherwise, a minimum of twenty-four hours notice is required.

Late arrivals are poor work practice. In many post secondary institutions, three late arrivals without an excuse will result in a first warning. One "no show" without advice will also result in a first warning. A second "no show" constitutes a warning for dismissal, while a third may result in termination. For further details, please refer to the section on Unsatisfactory Performance below.

## Information and Orientation Guidelines for Disability Support Workers in Post Secondary Education and Training

---

### Task boundaries

DSWs provide specific services to particular clients. The term specific indicates that DSW roles have definite boundaries beyond which it is inappropriate to go - usually in the interests of achieving the purposes of the role. However, there are other boundaries that should be taken into consideration.

#### Within the position description

The first consideration is the boundary indicated by the position description of the particular DSW role to which you have been appointed. That is, a note-taker does not, without discussion and agreement with the student and the disability practitioner, regularly undertake tasks outside their position description (e.g. do personal banking or return library books for their client). Of course, in order to be aware of these boundaries, it is essential to receive from the disability practitioner, a clear outline of the role, responsibilities and duties of the particular DSW role DSWs are to fulfil - preferably at an induction meeting.

#### Extra tasks

During the induction meeting between the disability practitioner, the client and the DSW, a number of extra tasks may, by agreement, be inserted in the position description with appropriate compensation regarding time or remuneration for the DSW. These tasks will depend very much on the needs of the client, the circumstances on the campus and the other resources available to assist students with disabilities. The tasks could include almost any activity that is considered reasonable and appropriate by the parties. There are other general extra support tasks which will not blur boundaries. For example, if asked, DSWs should feel able to assist clients with tasks such as:

- removing or replacing an outer item of clothing
- handing over a dropped or otherwise inaccessible item (e.g. a drink from their backpack)
- assisting with smoking if requested to do so.
- 

### Inappropriate activities

Some activities are decidedly inappropriate. In these guidelines, inappropriate covers six main areas.

First, any activities which undermine the independence and self-determination of the client.

## **Information and Orientation Guidelines for Disability Support Workers in Post Secondary Education and Training**

---

Second, anything that creates a barrier to a client's full participation in post secondary life.

Third, any activity not related to post secondary education or training or immediate personal or academic needs.

Fourth, anything that might inhibit the 'dignity of risk' that allows people to learn from their mistakes;

Fifth: anything that could undermine the working relationship between the DSW and the client; and,

Finally: any activity not previously considered and agreed to by the disability practitioner (ie. at the induction meeting or subsequently).

Of course, there are times when DSWs must make a judgment. As an additional guide, it is suggested that DSWs do not undertake tasks for which:

- The DSW is neither properly qualified nor trained;
- There is no authorisation e.g. Asking someone else to substitute for the DSW or bringing children or pets to work;
- Another DSW is specifically employed to perform for this client e.g. Generally, note-takers should not assist with toileting, eating or transferring. These are the responsibility of the attendant carer. Also, in most cases, purchasing lunch, drinks or snacks should be done by personal assistants or attendant carers;
- The client is responsible e.g. Borrowing/returning library books or handing in assignments or completing academic work. Odd as it may sound, whether a client is fulfilling course requirements is irrelevant to the DSW role. Academic achievement is the responsibility of the student, not the DSW. Nor, is it the responsibility of a DSW to discuss the client's academic performance with anyone or, unless in an interpreter role, to speak on behalf of the client. Requests from the client for information about class/subject matter should be directed to teaching staff or a tutor rather than the DSW;
- The client should be liable e.g. Borrowing/lending money, clothes or personal items;
- There are potential legal risks e.g. Assisting the client to commit any illegal acts, including taking or selling illicit drugs;
- There are potential social risks e.g. Sexual gratification;
- There are potential academic risks e.g. Any requests from the client for assistance in relation to cheating, plagiarising or otherwise falsifying work;

## **Information and Orientation Guidelines for Disability Support Workers in Post Secondary Education and Training**

---

- The disability practitioner is responsible e.g. Advising teaching staff about how to teach a particular client or recommending alternative arrangements for assessment;
- Other student services are responsible (or have expertise in) e.g. Counselling the client or providing psychological support;
- There are potential safety and/or insurance risks e.g. Transporting a client in a vehicle;
- There are potential teaching, learning and assessment consequences e.g. Participating in class discussions or giving answers to questions directed to the client;
- There are potential work relationship problems e.g. Discussing any personal information regarding the client with anyone; listening to the client's social or personal problems.

### **Section Three: Specific position descriptions**

These guidelines focus on the duty statements or position descriptions of eight of the most common disability support worker roles - attendant carer, interpreter, note-taker, mobility guide, participation assistant, personal assistant, reader and tutor. It is acknowledged that other disability support worker roles exist. These have been created from different aspects of various DSW jobs - depending on the needs of the particular client. In developing these position descriptions, the authors have drawn on the responses of students to the survey questionnaire and materials developed by disability practitioners at six Institutes of TAFE listed in the References section and at Monash and RMIT Universities.

#### **Attendant carer**

The role of an attendant carer is to accompany a student with severe or multiple impairments to assist with or perform any direct care duties that the client is unable to complete because of their disabilities. These everyday tasks may relate to learning, life management, grooming, lifting and transferring or health and hygiene. DSWs should always allow clients to tell them when these needs have been met. As specified in consultation with the disability practitioner and client (perhaps in an induction meeting), the major tasks will include some or all of the following:

Grooming - brushing hair, applying make-up, dressing, cleaning up after accidents (elimination or vomiting).

Health - assisting with taking medication or first aid, preparing/purchasing and assisting with meals and/or fluids (including alcohol if requested).

## **Information and Orientation Guidelines for Disability Support Workers in Post Secondary Education and Training**

---

Hygiene - toileting, hand washing, nose blowing, assistance with spectacles or contact lenses, or assisting with catheterisation - but only where appropriate training has been completed.

Learning - assisting the client to travel around campus including to and from class, the library, bookshop, cafeteria and toilets.

Life management - assisting with any on campus tasks such as banking, shopping (including purchasing cigarettes and alcohol if requested), paying bills, attending to correspondence or in relation to religious observance.

Lifting - to assist with lifting and/or transferring, where appropriate training has been completed and in accordance with the client's specifications.

### **Other supporting functions**

As an attendant carer, it is also the DSW's responsibility to carry out additional supporting functions that may be of a motivational, reassuring, academic or even moral nature. Here are some suggestions:

Respect the client's values and choices, taking particular care not to restrict their level of independence

Encourage the client to "have a go"

Discourage the client from relying on their DSW to do everything for them

Offer assistance then wait until it is requested, rather than just giving it

Meet the client's needs and wishes by discussing them and acting upon them (ie - follow directions, assist with tasks such as toileting when the client requests it rather than at a time convenient to the DSW)

Treat the client with dignity, privacy and confidentiality at all times

Reassure the client that they are able to trust their DSW to handle medical and personal care needs discreetly and competently. The client must also be able to trust the DSW abilities when lifting and transferring is required.

Be caring, relaxed and consistent, even when handling body wastes and soiled clothing. Stay positive and focus on the client not the task.

### **Safety**

Weights - Ensure that DSWs receive proper training before attempting weight bearing activities such as lifting or transferring clients

Wastes - Dispose of waste materials responsibly

## **Information and Orientation Guidelines for Disability Support Workers in Post Secondary Education and Training**

---

Contamination - Maintain safe practices regarding infections, burns, blood spills, equipment usage (especially syringes/needles) and avoiding re-contamination from taps or door handles

Accidents - Check water temperatures, protect against slips and falls

Emergency procedures - Know how to act in case of emergency or unforeseen situations

Medication - Be aware of the possibilities surrounding the dispensing of medication. There are negative side effects and dangers inherent in the use of medication. Also, there may be other reactions not listed below. If a DSW is uncertain, it is better to ask the disability practitioner and/or the client to clarify things straight away.

### **Side effects of medication**

Type of medication	Side effects and dangers
Anti-convulsants	Drowsiness
Tranquillisers	Weight gain, co-ordination problems
Other/non-specific	Seizures, diarrhoea, nausea, aggressive behaviour or psychotic episodes, speech/ vision/ hearing disturbances, blood abnormalities, poor concentration, headaches, sweating or fever, rashes, dizziness and fainting.

### **Missed medication**

Missed doses may result in behavioural problems, inactivity or lethargy, anxiety, increased pain, acute symptoms or worsening of the condition.

### **Attendant carer qualifications and experience**

It is recommended that DSWs in attendant carer roles should have all of the following qualifications:

- Certificate IV (Disability Studies), ACRACS or equivalent, and/or experience in providing support to people with disabilities in the areas outlined above.
- A current First Aid Certificate
- A current Victorian Police Certificate.

## Information and Orientation Guidelines for Disability Support Workers in Post Secondary Education and Training

---

### Interpreter

Sign interpreters facilitate communication between a person who is deaf/hearing impaired and hearing people by translating (voicing) spoken English into AUSLAN (signing) and vice versa.

The major task of an interpreter in the tertiary setting is to interpret all classroom communication, without exception, from and between teaching staff, other students, audio-visual materials and the client.

### Other supporting functions

Interpreters are required to work in accordance with the Australian Sign Language Interpreters Association (ASLIA) Code of Ethics (<http://www.aslia.com.au/national/ethics.htm> )

Interpreters, when introduced to the client prior to the first class, should discuss and establish the client's needs

Prior to the beginning of a class, interpreters should confer with the client and teaching staff to acquire an understanding of the content

Interpreters should sign what is spoken and speak what is signed, conveying meaning and intent

Interpreters should not add, embellish or delete information

Know the signs/spelling of technical terms and difficult words used in the subject

If appropriate, request that only one person speaks at a time so the interpreter can convey all communications to the client

If the teacher is moving around the room and making it difficult for the client to see both the teacher and interpreter, the interpreter could make the lecturer aware of this problem at the end of class;

Point to indicate the person speaking;

Stand or sit in a location where it is easy for the client to see you but try not to obscure the view of the board/overhead projector or the teacher for others;

The only time an interpreter should be involved in discussions is when a word or phrase needs to be clarified from either the hearing or hearing impaired person or when the hearing impaired person wishes to communicate

### Inappropriate additional tasks

Interpreters are not permitted by their code of practice to:

- Talk for the client or say things they believe the client might say;

## **Information and Orientation Guidelines for Disability Support Workers in Post Secondary Education and Training**

---

- Add their own ideas or attitudes to interpreted information;
- Make telephone calls for the person who is deaf/hearing impaired

### **Specific working conditions**

When working at the same tertiary institution for an entire day, an interpreter should negotiate a daily workload with the disability practitioner, balancing practical and lectures/theory classes.

When working alone in a class that demands continuous interpreting (ie - lecture/tutorial/theory class), the interpreter should take a rest break approximately every thirty minutes, negotiated in concurrence with the workload.

Occupational Overuse Syndrome (OOS) occurs due to signing for a prolonged time without control over the pace and without breaks or preparation exercises. To avoid OOS, interpreters should follow a preparatory exercise program as well as insisting on the right to rest breaks and working in tandem if necessary.

ASLIA recommends the use of two interpreters for a class of two or more hours duration.

Regardless of the number of interpreters, the disability practitioner should ask lecturers or teachers to speak a little slower when interpreters are present.

### **Interpreter accreditation, qualifications and experience**

The majority of interpreters, unless they are the children of deaf adults (CODAs), will have undertaken perhaps 2 years study acquiring Auslan language skills followed by another 2 or 3 years learning simultaneous interpreting skills. Auslan interpreters are rigorously examined and accredited by the National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters [Ltd] (NAATI) and, as indicated before, they have their own professional Code of Ethics.

Accreditation: the minimum for adequate performance in the tertiary education and training environment is NAATI Level 2

Qualifications: preferably post secondary education qualifications in the relevant subject area.

## **Mobility guide**

A mobility guide is employed to assist a person with an impairment who is unable to navigate around campus or move quickly between different class locations because of their functional limitations. A Guide may be a fellow student or someone from the community. Guiding a person with vision impairment successfully requires a few simple adjustments. Details in the section about interacting with students from different disability groups may also be of assistance.

## **Information and Orientation Guidelines for Disability Support Workers in Post Secondary Education and Training**

---

When guiding a person with vision impairment follow these suggestions:

- Describe the environment and changes in the walking surfaces, especially inclines or slippery surfaces
- Be specific with the use of language - rather than saying "over there", say "just a little further to your left". Instead of "look out" it is better to say "stop".
- The DSW's arm needs to be bent at a 90o angle. A client can then hold that arm just above the elbow and walk beside but a little behind the DSW.
- Alert the client when approaching stairs and indicate whether the stairs go up or down. Stop at the edge of the stairs, guiding the client's hand to any rail. Inform the client when nearing the end of the stairs and stop again when the top/bottom is reached.
- Inform the client when approaching a door and before opening it, clearly describe which way it opens.
- Be aware that when navigating through narrow spaces that the client will be further behind. Ensure they can maintain a grip above the elbow.
- Place the client's hand upon the door handle when getting into a car and inform them which way the car is facing. If it is next to the curb, tell them.
- Guide the client to a chair by placing their hand on the back of the chair and tell them which way it is facing.

### **Potential hazards**

Be aware of the following potential hazards:

- Overhanging objects like tree branches, stairways and open cupboard doors
- Moved furniture (internal and external), rubbish bins, bicycles etc.
- Objects on the ground (e.g. work sites) or floors (e.g. mats or power cords)
- Partially open doors (internal and external)
- Broken or uneven surfaces such as concrete upturned by tree roots
- Bollards on pathways, bannisters protruding from stairways and rails as in cafeteria queue guides
- Bike racks.
-

## Information and Orientation Guidelines for Disability Support Workers in Post Secondary Education and Training

---

### Notetaker

A DSW notetaker is employed to assist a student who, because of a disability, is unable to take an accurate and legible record of what is said or dictated in class, as part of library or other research for assignments or for timed written examinations. A notetaker may be a fellow student attending the same class; another student who has passed this or a similar subject before; or a member of the community employed to come onto campus to take notes. Although notetakers are expected to paraphrase what is said and write legible and well set out notes, they bear no responsibility for the client's academic achievement.

Generally, notetakers should adhere to the following guidelines:

- Discuss with the client prior to the first session any preferences regarding format, spacing, abbreviations and use of coloured pens, highlighters and underlining.
- It is useful to meet with the client 5 minutes before sessions to discuss any particular requirements for that session;
- Always label/identify the first page of notes with the full details of the circumstances in which they were taken and number and date each page;
- Use the language and structure/format which is suited to the needs of the client;
- Create legible, comprehensive notes consistent with the information provided (spoken and on overheads - unless print copies of overheads are available). Also record discussion and any specific instructions supplied during a class
- Use the language and structure/format which is suited to the needs of the client
- Use a wide margin (at least 5 cm) and leave blank 'white' spaces for later insertions or additions to the notes

Regardless of the form of notetaking or scribing, it is not the responsibility of a notetaker to:

- tutor the client on lecture/class content;
- work on any sort of assignment for the client;
- photocopy notes for clients, their friends or other students;

### Dimensions of the role

There are three important dimensions to the notetakers role.

First, taking class notes which, as the name suggests, are taken during teaching classes.

## Information and Orientation Guidelines for Disability Support Workers in Post Secondary Education and Training

---

Second, taking notes in the library or resource room for research for an assignment - as dictated by the client rather than directly from a text.

Third, scribing in tests and written examinations from what the client dictates under exam or test conditions.

### Class notes

With regard to taking notes in class, in addition to the general points listed above, DSW notetakers should follow these points:

- Negotiate seating arrangements with the client. A client may wish to sit next to or completely separate from the DSW. Respect the seating arrangements requested by the client
- Do not attempt to write down every word. Instead, paraphrase so as to convey the sense and content of what is said.
- Negotiate arrangements for handing the notes to the client after the class. Do they want to receive the notes immediately or later in private?
- Pay attention and note explanations of points included in a handout.
- Ask the teacher to clarify any important missed information after the class; (only interrupt if it is important and it seems appropriate)
- Allow the student to read the notes as they are written down if they wish.
- Write explanations of abbreviations at the beginning or end of notes or spend time with the client at the beginning of the working relationship to work out some agreed abbreviations.
- If the lecturer/teacher refers to a handout or other text, reference this in the notes - ie Smith and Jones, p.21
- Do not waste time copying text or diagrams that are included in a handout. Instead, provide any explanation the lecturer may give with an appropriate reference - e.g. "diagram 2 shows...".
- Attempt to note down as much of what is said as possible during discussions, particularly if notetaking for a hearing impaired student
- Avoid talking to the client during class as it distracts both the client and other members of the class. Questions or comments could be written down and/or saved until after class
- Read over the notes when finished to ensure all points are clear and any missing information is inserted
- Ensure notes are a true and accurate account of the class and do not contain any personal bias

## **Information and Orientation Guidelines for Disability Support Workers in Post Secondary Education and Training**

---

- Request feedback to ensure the notes are satisfactory for the client's needs.

### **Library/ research notes**

With regard to taking notes in the library, in addition to the general points listed above, DSW notetakers could find these points useful. It will be observed that there are many similarities with class notes.

- Head each page with the full bibliographical details of the given text, even if the client is dictating a paraphrased version of what they are reading.
- Always note the text's page number in the margin of the notes
- Copy any formulas, diagrams, figures, tables, charts or graphs the client requests. If there are a significant number or they are complex in nature, do not waste time copying by hand. It may be more efficient to photocopy these at the client's expense.
- Ensure any verbatim quotes are distinguishable from ordinary notes and are accurate and fully referenced.
- Ensure accuracy and impartiality when writing notes dictated by the client. Write only what the client says and do not make any corrections unless asked to do so.

### **Examination scribing**

With regard to scribing in an examination, in addition to the general points listed above, it is important that DSW notetakers also adhere to these points:

- Follow all instructions given by the examiner and/or provided on the examination paper.
- Complete accurately the student's details on the cover of the exam booklet (or type the client's full details if doing the exam on a word processor).
- Do not discuss any aspect of the exam except when seeking to clarify something the client has dictated.
- Write/type/do only and exactly what the client asks. This includes writing every word dictated including grammatical and spelling errors and doing exactly what the client asks (e.g. "cross that out" or "put this in quotes").
- Write answers exactly as the client dictates, even if there is a concern about whether it is correct.
- Take care not to indicate an opinion (positive or negative) about anything dictated especially by non-verbal sounds or body language.

## **Information and Orientation Guidelines for Disability Support Workers in Post Secondary Education and Training**

---

- Do not offer information or answer any questions from the client about anything to do with the exam paper.

### **Provision of materials**

The cost of materials necessary for good notetaking or scribing can mount up. Therefore, it is important to clarify with the client and the disability practitioner who will be responsible for the purchase of general materials (pens, pencils, rulers, highlighters, or erasers), subject specific materials \* (e.g. compass or protractor); paper (laptop, notebooks, legal pads, graph paper); or other equipment and/or services required to ensure access to information and learning facilities (e.g. FM transceiver, real time captioning (typed), hard copies of overheads, captioned videos).

### **Notetaker qualifications and experience**

Notetaking Certificate and/or extensive notetaking experience;

and

A background knowledge of the required or similar subject area

ie. History, Engineering, Music, Computers.

### **Participation assistant**

The role known as a participation assistant or integration worker is very flexible. Depending on the needs of the client, it may be part personal assistance, part reader and part tutor but is usually focused more on teaching support than on learning support (such as a tutor).

The overall purpose of the position is to assist a client to participate in and benefit from classroom activities.

Tasks may include:

- Taking notes in language that the student will understand or helping the student to keep a record of the content, discussion and specific instructions given in class;
- Providing additional support outside normal classroom hours to reinforce material (theory and practical skills) presented by the teacher;
- Providing an explanation or clarification of procedures, words and new concepts;
- Assisting the student with gathering materials and structuring assignments, preparing for examinations;

## **Information and Orientation Guidelines for Disability Support Workers in Post Secondary Education and Training**

---

- Assisting the student to develop and improve time-management skills and study techniques;
- Encourage student independence and ownership of work;
- Physical assistance where necessary.

### **Participation assistant qualifications and experience**

Qualifications, knowledge or experience in the required subject area e.g. Horticulture, Engineering, Music, Computer science.

Teaching and/or specific experience in working with adults with intellectual disabilities would be highly desirable.

### **Personal assistant**

In these guidelines, 'personal assistant' is used to differentiate between this job and that of an attendant carer. A personal assistant does not perform those tasks relating to lifting or hygiene but otherwise may be required to perform tasks similar to those of an attendant carer. A personal assistant is more likely to be employed to assist those clients who may require some extra help for a few hours per week to access post secondary facilities, particularly libraries, but are otherwise independent.

Tasks may include some or all of the following:

- Library assistance - helping the client access the cataloguing system; find and acquire texts; photocopying; accessing equipment such as videos, music and microfilm; borrowing and returning books;
- Performing any on campus administrative tasks such as helping the client change their subjects; enrolling; paying fines; banking; shopping; paying bills or writing correspondence;
- Assisting with the replacement or removal of an outer item of clothing;
- Assisting with the purchasing of food, drink and cigarettes and any tasks related to the client accessing these items - ie undoing wrappers or lids;
- Assisting with any tasks relating the practice of religion (if requested).

### **Other supporting functions**

One of the major supporting functions of a personal assistant is to encourage the client in pursuit of their education or training goals. This means assisting with tasks that the client needs help with because of the effects of their impairment or medical condition rather than doing everything for them. The other supporting functions are:

- Respect the client's values and choices, taking particular care not to restrict their level of independence;
- Discourage the client from relying on their DSW to do everything for them ('learned dependence');

## Information and Orientation Guidelines for Disability Support Workers in Post Secondary Education and Training

---

- Take care not to deprive them or allow over-exertion. The client should not feel that they are being forced to do something which is difficult for them and for which the DSW is employed;
- Offer assistance then wait until it is requested, rather than just giving it;
- Meet individual's needs and wishes by discussing them and acting upon them - there may be additional tasks not discussed prior to the commencement of work, but which the client discovers are too difficult or exhausting for them to manage.

### Reader

A reader is required to attend sessions with the client and read to them any requested material. These sessions may be conducted in the library, in classes or separate rooms, or in exam rooms. The reader may also be required to read material onto audio-tape. Readers may be students or members of the community.

It is important for readers to remember the following:

- Always provide the client with identifying information about the material - ie author, title, date published, chapter titles, page numbers;
- Indicate who is speaking if the text involves dialogue;
- Speak clearly and consistently. DSWs may need to try hard not to sound distracted or bored if the subject matter is not of interest to them;
- Indicate when a new page is begun, especially if reading text onto tape;
- Do not embellish or add any information not contained in the text. A reader may leave out certain kinds of material but only under instruction from the client;
- Under exam conditions, the reader must read exactly and fully, what is contained in the text. In some circumstances it may be necessary for the reader to modify explanations to a level the client can understand. However, the client is expected to show comprehension of course-specific terminology;
- Readers should not make any comments unless asked to clarify text content by a client;
- Readers should not place any undue emphasis or intonation (pitch of voice) when reading a passage;
- Readers are advised not to give the client any interpretation regarding information on an exam/test paper. All client questions must be directed to the examiner/supervisor;

## **Information and Orientation Guidelines for Disability Support Workers in Post Secondary Education and Training**

---

### **Volunteer training and experience**

The Royal Victorian Institute trains volunteer readers to a high standard in reading for people with vision or neurological impairments for the Blind (RVIB) at their Talking Book Library.

### **Tutor**

A DSW tutor is usually employed to design and conduct private tutoring sessions to assist their client to understand and/or learn material presented in classes. Tutoring sessions will take place at an agreed location on campus. Tutors may be employed or contracted by the disability practitioners or, alternatively, provided by the department or an agency. Tutors are expected to assist the client to the best of their ability however, they cannot be held accountable for a client's academic results.

The major task of the tutor is to supplement the teaching of the subject with one-on-one learning support.

### **Other supporting functions**

- Unlike any of the other DSW positions, a tutor's specific role is to provide the client with tutorial support outside the class setting. As such, it is a tutor's responsibility to aid the client's understanding of any elements of their study with which they may have difficulty. In addition, a tutor should also attempt to:
- Identify which areas of the curriculum the client is having difficulty understanding;
- Help develop individualised strategies and methods, which will assist understanding and retention;
- Test the client's knowledge through discussion and asking questions;
- Assist the client to develop and improve studying techniques;
- Encourage the client to implement a studying schedule/timetable;
- Encourage independent thought and ownership of work;
- Conduct sessions with the client in a respectful and consistent manner;

### **Tutor qualifications and experience**

Teaching qualifications or high academic results and significant tutoring experience  
High level of knowledge in the required subject (ie - music, computers).

## **Section Four: Interacting with clients**

This section deals with some general guidelines for interacting with students with disabilities as clients and makes some suggestions about how to work effectively with clients from specific disability groups. In drawing together this information, the author is indebted to the works of Anderson and Madden (1996) and the contribution of the students who participated in the survey and/or interviews.

Generally, when interacting with clients DSW's can show consideration and respect by keeping these three important points in mind:

Firstly, always treat people with disabilities in an age-appropriate manner and encourage their independence and self-determination;

Secondly, be positive, consistent and relaxed. Do not be afraid of using figures of speech such as "See you later" or "That's a crazy idea."

Thirdly, always ask if assistance is required (never assume that it is). Do not be offended if the client declines the offer. If the offer is accepted, always ask for instructions from the client about how best to assist them.

Also:

Find out whether the client is comfortable talking about their disability and act accordingly. If they would prefer that it not be mentioned in the presence of others, it is considerate to refrain from doing so.

If the client prefers not to introduce the DSW or explain the presence of the DSW to a friend, this preference should be respected without offence being taken.

Be as unobtrusive as possible. Always be aware that the presence of a DSW has the potential to embarrass the client by highlighting their disability.

While it is acceptable to indicate understanding or empathy, it is better to refrain from expressing pity or making remarks which appear to indicate "feeling sorry for" the client. Few clients are pitiful and most do not want sympathy, just consideration.

Respect the client's right to take risks, including smoking and drinking alcohol. Do not comment about their choices.

As indicated earlier, the degree of severity of a disability will differ, even if two clients have a impairment or condition with the same name. It would be better not to make the assumption that because two clients have the same disability, it means they have the same needs. Consider two clients with vision impairments; the first is able to see the lecturer but needs written material in enlarged print; the second, although not totally blind, is legally blind, and needs even larger print and may need the assistance from a guide dog or white cane to navigate around campus.

## Information and Orientation Guidelines for Disability Support Workers in Post Secondary Education and Training

---

Knowing something about the client's disability may give a DSW a greater understanding of the challenges they face on a day-to-day basis but it is not absolutely necessary. Further, the client is under no obligation to discuss their disability with the DSW or anyone else. If further information would assist the DSW in determining how to best help the client, the DSW may ask the client.

Unfortunately, some people without disabilities refer to those who have disabilities in terms of their impairment or medical condition. Examples are when people say "He's an epileptic." "She's spastic." This is inappropriate because the consequence of the impairment becomes the focus of (negative) attention and the person is overlooked.

Two of the most important things to remember when working with a student with a disability, the 'client', are:

- do not treat a client differently because they have a disability and they need some extra help in order for them to manage everyday tasks;
- do not assume that a DSW can know what is needed by a client because of experience of working with someone else with the same condition. The nature and degree of the disability and therefore the kind and amount of assistance, will vary from client to client.

Here is some more specific information about how to interact effectively with clients from different disability groups in a courteous, thoughtful, sensitive and sensible manner.

### Clients with hearing impairments

Hearing loss or being 'hard of hearing' involves a change (reduction) in the ability to perceive pitch (frequency range) and/or volume. Hearing loss may be present at birth (congenital) or acquired during life as a result of disease or injury. Hearing loss can be:

- Mild loss of a few sounds in the range;
- Moderate loss of many sounds, particularly speech;
- Severe loss of most sounds. Although a hearing aid may aid;
- Perception, diminished speech quality may exist due to speech and language not developing naturally; which in turn impacts on reading skills;
- Profound loss of nearly all sounds. Speech completely inaudible. Hearing aids useless;
- Deafness means the person can perceive no sound.
- The client with mild or moderate loss may misunderstand or completely miss information, especially when background noise is present.

## **Information and Orientation Guidelines for Disability Support Workers in Post Secondary Education and Training**

---

Although a hearing aid may help, the client will have to concentrate very hard to determine/guess what has been missed.

There may be a tendency to consider young people with greater amounts of hearing loss, as delayed in their intellectual development. However, this is not necessarily the case. Any difficulties the person with a hearing impairment may have can possibly be explained by the circumstances of their early development. Significant congenital or early hearing loss means that the child misses out on hearing and talking to others. This often results in poor speech and language development and reduced reading and comprehension skills. Given that so much about learning, reading and understanding language depends on the spoken word, it is not surprising that these skills might not be as well developed in someone with a hearing impairment. For example, whereas an average 'hearing' student will enter school with a vocabulary of several thousand English words, a student with a severe hearing loss may have only 2-300 words. A deaf child who has experience in signing will have only a few more English words than a non-signing child.

### **Lip-Reading**

Not all people who are deaf or hard of hearing are able to lip read well. Furthermore, there is a common misunderstanding that those who do lip-read are able to make out every word. In fact, the very best lip-readers pick up only about 30 percent of the spoken word. The remainder has to be guessed from body language and facial expressions.

### **Sign languages**

A form of communication often used by deaf and hearing impaired people is sign language using the forearms, hands and fingers to make signs which are read visually. Two of these languages are Signed English and Australian Sign Language known as 'Auslan'. The former has signs which correspond directly to English words and it uses finger spelling in which there is a specific sign for each letter of the alphabet. Auslan is quite different from signed English. It is a distinct and separate language which does not contain readily distinguishable standard tenses, pronouns or the verb "to be". Most people who are deaf and use sign language regard English as their second language.

### **Cultural difference**

Many people who are deaf do not consider themselves impaired or disabled but merely culturally different because they have a signed form of communication and a visual language. When meeting and working with someone who comes from another country it is polite and respectful to learn something of their culture and language. The same

## **Information and Orientation Guidelines for Disability Support Workers in Post Secondary Education and Training**

---

protocol applies when working with a person who is deaf and uses Auslan. Learning some basic signs to greet and, perhaps, the finger spelling alphabet to ask questions will improve the client-DSW relationship.

Here are some basic tips about interacting with clients who are deaf or hard of hearing:

Attract the attention of the client by creating a vibration on the floor (stamping) or a table (knocking) but refrain from tapping the client on the shoulder as this constitutes an invasion of their personal space;

The DSW's face needs to be visible and well lit and neither hands nor objects such as pens or cigarettes obscuring a view of the DSW's mouth;

Maintain eye contact with client, speaking directly to them, not their interpreter;

Help lip-readers by facing them and avoiding eating or chewing gum while speaking;

Refrain from shouting or speaking more slowly than usual because these strategies also make it harder for the person to lip-read;

Use plain English and short sentences while maintaining the appropriate intellectual level of information;

If the client does not understand what has been said the first time, try rephrasing it;

Allow enough time for interpretation and a response;

Concentrate carefully when a person with a hearing impairment or deafness is speaking (because their words may not be clear);

If you miss or do not understand what has been said, ask the client to repeat it. It is always better to understand exactly what has been said than to be overly polite and miss the point altogether;

### **Clients with an intellectual disability**

There is no consensus in Australia on the definition of an intellectual disability except perhaps in terms of service eligibility. In many states, intellectual impairment is found to be present if a person scores 70 or less on a measure of intellectual ability and, broadly, has difficulty managing everyday living skills.

Intellectual disability is defined in the Intellectually Disabled Persons' Services Act (1986) in relation to a person over the age of 5 years as a significant sub-average general intellectual functioning existing concurrently with deficits in adaptive behaviour and manifested during the developmental period.

In other words, without appropriate support, people with intellectual disabilities may have difficulty in an educational environment with: expressing themselves verbally; self care such as being aware when it is appropriate to put on or take off a layer of clothing or to maintain personal hygiene; or, understanding teaching/instruction.

## **Information and Orientation Guidelines for Disability Support Workers in Post Secondary Education and Training**

---

These difficulties may give rise to misunderstandings and frustration which is expressed, sometimes, in angry body language or violence against themselves (e.g. head banging or hand biting) or others. Other areas of difficulty are thinking through things and working out a plan of action; and, the ability to undertake fine motor activities (e.g. handwriting, drawing, tying laces and eating (tidily)).

Intellectual Disability also ranges in degree from borderline average to profound and people with different levels of disability are usually referred to as having low support needs, moderate support needs and high or very high support needs. Anderson and Madden (1996) point out that people with intellectual disabilities of any degree can learn and participate successfully in education and training if they are provided with:

- Support and assistance;
- Reduced task complexity (ie. breaking tasks down into component parts);
- Opportunities to repeat tasks;
- Rewards for the successful completion of tasks (reinforcement).

They also indicate that expectations, especially those of parents, can play a big part in the impact of an intellectual disability on a person's ability to benefit from education and training opportunities. Therefore, the attitude and behaviour of a DSW can contribute significantly to client success.

Some tips for interacting effectively with clients with an intellectual disability include:

- Endeavour to treat your client in an age-appropriate way. Do not treat the person as you would an infant or child ('infantilise' the person);
- Respect decisions made by the client with regard to personal care (e.g. what to eat or whether or not to leave a class early for a cigarette);
- Explain things (activities, tasks or consequences of actions) in a relaxed and positive manner using plain English;
- Use short sentences and/or simple semi-closed questions (simple or Yes or No answers) while maintaining the appropriate intellectual level of information;
- Listen/pay careful attention while your client responds;
- If you miss or do not understand what has been said, ask them to repeat it. It is always better to understand exactly what has been said than to be overly polite and miss the point altogether;
- Reinforce appropriate behaviour.
-

## Information and Orientation Guidelines for Disability Support Workers in Post Secondary Education and Training

---

### Clients with chronic medical conditions

Medical conditions are often impossible to detect with a cursory glance. In fact, many clients with medical conditions are said to have 'hidden' disabilities when, in fact, they may be experiencing pain or fatigue as well as the side effects of medication.

Be aware that people with medical conditions may:

- Appreciate not being asked lots of questions about their medical condition;
- Downplay the seriousness of their condition or how unwell they are feeling. Respect these wishes at all times;
- Need to take medication. This should be respected and, if necessary, assisted;
- Need to reschedule sessions because of pain, fatigue and/or side effects of medication;
- Need to lie down and/or move around during sessions. Prior to commencing work with the client, find out whether there are any special requirements along these lines or any side effects of medication that you should know about - ie. fitting, restlessness.

Medical conditions are not necessarily stable and, sometimes, for no discernible reason, a client may be feeling more pain or more fatigue than usual. Some medical conditions are degenerative and, eventually, life-threatening. As their condition worsens (temporarily or permanently), clients may use aids such as splints, crutches or a wheelchair/scooter.

Clients with medical conditions may also be more susceptible to common illnesses and infections such as colds, flu, and chicken pox. While it is the client's responsibility to protect themselves from infection, it is the DSWs responsibility not to infect the client. Before commencing work with a client who has a medical condition, ascertain whether contracting common or minor infections will be seriously detrimental to their overall health. If this is so, DSWs should excuse themselves from working when they are ill.

### Clients with mental health problems

The term 'mental health problems' encapsulates a range of often unobservable or 'hidden' disorders grouped into three broad areas:

Conduct = behavioural disorders, distractibility, impulsivity

Feeling = anxiety, panic or phobias e.g. fear of open spaces (agoraphobia)

Thinking = schizophrenias or bi-polar disorder (previously known as manic-depressive disorder)

## **Information and Orientation Guidelines for Disability Support Workers in Post Secondary Education and Training**

---

Generally, mental health problems also include a fourth group of disorders arising from substance abuse (alcohol or drugs - illicit or prescription).

Mental health problems are regarded as the most disabling and least understood or tolerated in post secondary education and training. Although quite often gifted academically, people with mental health problems usually underachieve due to their illness and/or medication causing short term memory and motivational difficulties. They also may not have the same resilience as their peers to deal with unhelpful staff, complicated procedures, confusing or non-existent directions, inflexible programs or uncomfortable/ depressing physical environments.

Notwithstanding this, it is important to remember that most students with mental health problems are generally stable and interesting people. Some will have the following sorts of difficulties:

- Restlessness;
- Lack of confidence (and difficulty making decisions);
- Low self-esteem (and difficulty making commitments/plans);
- Susceptibility to stress;
- Anxiety and/or panic attacks.

Most of these difficulties are controlled by medication. However, as with any student, an emergency situation may arise. It is not the responsibility of a DSW to develop a plan for managing such an eventuality but it would be wise to ensure that you have an understanding of any disability practitioner emergency plan (developed with the particular client) which includes a clear procedure and contact numbers for:

- the client's general practitioner and/or treating psychiatrist;
- the state government's regional psychiatric services team;
- family members;
- community support groups; and
- campus security services.

In addition, some clients with mental health problems may have difficulty getting to and from classes, concentrating, remaining motivated, working alone, getting along with others or, sometimes, behaving in a socially acceptable manner. In such circumstances the following may be helpful:

- Stay positive, consistent and understanding;
- Whenever possible, ignore inappropriate or odd behaviour (and encourage others to do the same);

## Information and Orientation Guidelines for Disability Support Workers in Post Secondary Education and Training

---

- Treat the client as though they are able to make choices about their behaviour;
- Reinforce appropriate behaviours;
- Proceed with a clear set of guidelines (ie. when to continue after an interruption or when to implement an emergency plan)
- 

### Clients with neurological impairments

Neurological impairments are to do with the functioning of the brain and central nervous system. They include conditions which are present at birth and life-long such as Learning Disabilities (LDs), and others which can happen later as a result of an injury or disease like Acquired Brain Injury (ABI). The disabilities arising from these 'hidden' impairments are often bewildering to the observer, especially in a post secondary educational environment. This may be because a person can exhibit excellent verbal skills and yet be unable to express themselves as well when asked to write it down. Another person may have no trouble writing things but has great difficulty verbalising their thoughts. For others it may be reading or maths calculations which are most challenging.

The difficulty in understanding LDs are compounded by the broad spectrum of conditions it encompasses and a multitude of definitions. The most frequently used definition originates from the National Joint Committee of Learning Disabilities (NJCLD) in the United States 1988 in which learning disabilities are described (quoted in Hammill, 1990:1 cited in Barr, Parr and Heavens (1995)) as:

" ... a heterogeneous group of disorders manifested by significant difficulties in the acquisition and use of listening, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning or mathematical abilities. These disorders are intrinsic to the individual, presumed to be due to central nervous system dysfunction, and may occur across the life span."

Other problems which may coexist with LD but, on their own, do not constitute LD include hyperactivity and impulsiveness. LDs may also occur concurrently with other conditions such as mental retardation, severe emotional disturbance or sensory impairment or with other external influences such as cultural differences and unsuitable early teaching methods - but none of these factors are related to LD.

In addition to problems with reading, writing, speaking, listening, reasoning or mathematical abilities, people with LD may also have difficulties following directions, processing sequential information (ie tables or lists), remembering appointments and organising themselves. Intellectually, people with LD may range from below average to gifted and, although they experience difficulties in one area of education and training,

## Information and Orientation Guidelines for Disability Support Workers in Post Secondary Education and Training

---

they may be able to compensate for these with significant strengths in other areas. LD may also be associated with greater levels of anxiety, lower concentration levels, poorer use of preparation time and presentation strategies, low self-esteem and lack of confidence.

Unlike many other disabilities which are congenital or acquired early in life, LD is often not diagnosed until the person is enrolled in a post secondary education or training course. It is important to understand that, if this is the case, although LD may explain the person's difficulties, having to develop coping strategies and using learning assistance may be new to the person. Therefore, the utmost patience is called for while these are being developed.

Acquired brain injury can also be difficult for a person to cope with. Sometimes the person may have to deal with significant changes in their personality and physical and intellectual abilities. They may have to relearn many skills when they can remember how things were before their injury. This can give rise to enormous frustration and anger. As with clients with LDs, coping strategies and learning assistance for the person with ABI may be new and patience is required.

### Clients with physical/motor impairments

Disabilities can arise from a wide range of orthopaedic and neuromuscular impairments. An impairment may be congenital (present at birth) or acquired - through injury or illness. However, in every instance, such impairments limit the type and amount of physical or motor activities a person can undertake.

The degree of disability resulting from the impairment may also be affected by the length of time the person has been coping with their impairment. For example, a person who has used a wheelchair all their life is likely to regard the wheelchair as part of themselves and be more confident in its use. On the other hand, a person who has recently lost the use of their dominant hand will be experiencing significant grief at this loss and, possibly, greater frustration with being unable to do things for themselves as they did before.

Tips for relating to people with physical disabilities:

- When meeting a person with a physical/motor disability, it is appropriate to shake hands, even with the left hand. If shaking hands is not possible, acknowledge the person by touching their arm or hand;
- Speak to the person, not their companion or carer;

## Information and Orientation Guidelines for Disability Support Workers in Post Secondary Education and Training

---

- Remember, some people who use scooters and wheelchairs are able to stand or walk short distances. You may be asked to help them to transfer themselves from their chair to an ordinary chair.
- A person who has a lower limb impairment, may need frequent rest breaks whether or not they use walking aids (crutches, walking stick, frame). In any situation, ask if a seat is required.
- Wheelchairs and scooters are usually considered to be part of the user's personal space. Do not invade this space (ie touching or leaning on the chair) without invitation.
- Whenever possible, ensure conversations are carried out on the same eye level. This provides a comfortable position for the person in the wheelchair and also lessens an imbalance in any perceived power relationship
- Resist any temptation to treat the person in a wheelchair like a child. Do not pat them on the head or shoulder or otherwise treat them in a patronising manner.
- Always ask if you can help before pushing a wheelchair or assisting a person with a physical disability in other ways. If your offer is accepted, request instructions as how best to proceed. There are techniques which may be unfamiliar to you that minimise the danger and the user's anxiety and prevent injury to you.
- 

### Clients with speech/communication difficulties

Communication difficulties arise from language disorders and/or a speech disorders which may be caused by a hearing impairment, autism, cerebral palsy or a neurological dysfunction.

A speech disorder involves difficulty with the physical process of speaking and is characterised by a reduced ability to:

- produce speech sounds (articulation);
- maintain speech rhythm (fluent speech); and
- control vocal production (voice). This area of difficulty can result in stuttering and mispronouncing words.

A language disorder involves difficulty with communication using the symbols of written language and speech and is characterised by:

- difficulties with the proper use of words and their meanings;

## Information and Orientation Guidelines for Disability Support Workers in Post Secondary Education and Training

---

- inappropriate grammatical patterns;
- inappropriate use of speech sounds.
- 

A person with a language disorder may find it hard to use and/or comprehend:

- semantics - using the meaning of words appropriately.
- syntax - applying accepted grammatical structures
- phonology - making proper speech sounds and
- pragmatics - the practical use of language.
- 

It is important to appreciate the impact a speech/communication impairment may have on a student's confidence and self esteem. These clients are often fearful of having to speak in front of others and, without support and understanding, they may experience severe embarrassment, withdrawal and, eventually, a total refusal or inability to interact with other people.

These suggestions for working with people with speech/communication impairments may be useful:

- When the client is speaking, listen carefully (and encourage others to do the same);
- Attempt to pick up the content rather than focusing on mistakes in speech;
- Create opportunities to model (give an example of) correct speech rather than criticising errors;
- Never mimic what is said;
- Refrain from finishing the person's sentences for them;
- Remember, even though the person may have good hearing, they may also have difficulty understanding spoken or written language. Use plain English when speaking to the person and refrain from using complex words unless these are known by the client;
- When reading to a client, give additional simple terms for complex words;
- Do not raise your voice unless the client requests it. Use an ordinary tone of voice;
- Consider asking closed questions that require a short answer, Yes or No.

## Information and Orientation Guidelines for Disability Support Workers in Post Secondary Education and Training

---

### Clients with vision impairments

The amount and type of vision a person with a vision impairment may have will vary. People with low vision will be able to perform all tasks independently with the use of aids such as spectacles. Those who are legally or totally blind will have different needs. Legal blindness is a significant loss of vision in either or both eyes, of distance or field vision. Distance vision loss means the person cannot read, even with corrective lenses, a letter six metres away which is intended to be seen at sixty metres. Field vision loss is evident when the normal range of vision (180 degrees) is reduced to less than 20 degrees. Total blindness indicates the person is incapable of differentiating or identifying anything.

Some of the variations in vision include:

- total blindness in one eye;
- total blindness in both eyes;
- light perception only;
- night blindness;
- large objects only;
- perfect 20/20 central vision but limited peripheral vision (tunnel vision - like looking through a tube);
- limited central vision but good peripheral vision.

It may be useful to note that, irrespective of the kind of vision a person has, illness, fatigue, glare or poor light may reduce their vision further. Also, it is rare that people with vision impairments or who are blind have no light perception at all.

When interacting with a person with a vision impairment, these easy suggestions may be helpful:

- When meeting touch their hand or say their name to indicate you are speaking to them;
- Introduce yourself and others with you;
- Speak directly to the person, making eye contact just as you would with anyone else. Do not address yourself to the person's guide or assistant;
- Do not speak to or pat a guide dog when in its harness as this distracts it from its important work;
- When giving directions, be specific. Rather than saying "over there", say "three paces in front of you..." ;
- Inform the person if you move or need to end the conversation;

## **Information and Orientation Guidelines for Disability Support Workers in Post Secondary Education and Training**

---

- When in a room or an environment with which the person is very familiar, inform them if something is out of place or otherwise obstructing their path (e.g. the table which is usually left of the door is now in the centre of the room);
- Do not be afraid to say things like "See you later". These are merely figures of speech, not insensitive comments.
- 

### **Section Five: Performance evaluation**

Good employers provide all their employees with a regular opportunity for performance evaluation. Many people regard any sort of evaluation as a negative experience to be endured but a well-conducted review allows for many positive outcomes. These include: a review of specified tasks and responsibilities (often lost sight of); an update of the position description (perhaps leading to improvements in pay and conditions); confirmation of increased skills and abilities; opportunities for the DSW to clarify issues and concerns and, invariably, growth in the role. Performance evaluation also allows for constructive criticism by a manager (disability practitioner), which DSWs can use to improve their performance and, thereby, take greater pride in their performance and standards. The focus of an evaluation should be on measuring the DSWs performance of the role and responsibilities against the duties specified in the current position description: any personal relationship (good or bad) between the disability practitioner and the DSW should play no part in an evaluation.

In addition to formal performance evaluation, from time to time there may be criticism of a DSWs performance in relation to a specific activity or event. In other instances the criticism may be more general. In either case there should ensue an informal discussion between the disability practitioner and the DSW during which the DSW would be given an opportunity to put forward their perspective on the matter. If this does not resolve the matter to the satisfaction of the disability practitioner, it can be dealt with in one of two ways.

The first may be a formal verbal warning given by the disability practitioner to the DSW. That is, a statement to the effect that the DSW must amend their performance in a specific way or ways within a specified time or there will be further consequences (such as one or two written warnings then dismissal). In instances where a serious offence or a significant breach has occurred, a DSW may be dismissed immediately. It is important that a newly appointed DSW takes steps to learn about the policy of the institution or agency in all these and related matters.

Students noted two areas in which DSWs may perform poorly - causing their clients to be distressed: negative behaviours and inappropriate attitudes.

Negative behaviours:-

## Information and Orientation Guidelines for Disability Support Workers in Post Secondary Education and Training

---

- Becoming angry and impatient with a client
- Being inattentive, lazy or unmotivated
- Being late or leaving a session early or being otherwise unreliable
- Grumpiness, abruptness or other forms of moodiness
- Frequently overlooking personal hygiene (breath, body and clothing)
- Forcing personal values and beliefs onto a client
- Not listening to instructions or requests
- Being abusive towards a client.
- Inappropriate attitudes
- Disregarding the personal and educational goals of a client
- Disregarding the importance of their work deadlines
- Disregarding privacy or confidentiality
- Being patronising, condescending, or disrespectful
- Being over-protective or ignoring clients' rights to self-determination
- Forgetting that clients have earned their tertiary places like everyone else.
- Being intolerant of a client's ethnicity, religious beliefs or sexual orientation
- Being judgmental or treating clients as a 'charity cases'.

### General grounds for warning or termination

The table overleaf sets out ten general areas of behaviour/attitude which may constitute grounds for a warning or termination of employment after a process of enquiry as dictated by the human resources policies and procedures within the institution. One, two or three warnings may be given according to the seriousness of the offence and the likelihood of improvement. A fourth warning usually results in dismissal. If a disability practitioner determines that an offence is serious enough, they may dismiss a DSW immediately without any warnings.

### Complaints

All instances of abuse of the DSW role (e.g. aggressiveness, offensive behaviour, unreasonable requests and frequent failure to keep appointments /commitments by either the client or the DSW) should be reported to the disability practitioner. However,

## Information and Orientation Guidelines for Disability Support Workers in Post Secondary Education and Training

---

it is the prerogative of the DSW to attempt to resolve the situation with the client first before advising the disability practitioner.

Should a DSW wish to make a formal complaint, the matter should be referred directly to the disability practitioners Office and, if it cannot be resolved there, the institution's Complaints and Grievance Procedure may be invoked. Similarly, complaints made by clients against DSWs should also be handled through the disability practitioner first and, if the matter cannot be resolved there, it may be necessary to refer it to the Student Rights Officer on campus.

All complaints will be handled with the strictest confidence.

<b>Table 2: Grounds for a warning or termination of employment</b>		
General areas	Specific offence/s	Likely consequences
Confidentiality	Breaking client confidentiality (includes discussing client with friends, other staff, family)	Second warning or Dismissal
Fraud	Falsifying timecards/pay sheets	Dismissal
Sexual harassment	Sexual harassment of a client	Second or third warning
Substance abuse	Appearing for work under the influence of drugs or alcohol	Dismissal
Tasks - non-compliance	Non-compliance with tasks specified in P.D. or induction meeting	First or second warning
Tasks - inappropriate	Performance of any inappropriate tasks	Second warning or Dismissal
Theft	Theft from clients or other staff	Dismissal
Threats	Threatening behaviour towards clients or other staff	Third warning or Dismissal
Verbal abuse	Verbal or emotional abuse towards a client	Dismissal

## Information and Orientation Guidelines for Disability Support Workers in Post Secondary Education and Training

Violence/abuse	Physical or sexual violence/ abuse towards a client	Dismissal
----------------	--------------------------------------------------------	-----------

### Job dissatisfaction

If a DSW finds that the role and responsibilities are not as they believed them to be or the DSW is otherwise dissatisfied, it would be wise for the DSW to consult other DSWs or the disability practitioner about their concerns. Such a consultation will allow for a check that the work undertaken is as it should be or, perhaps, learn about strategies for overcoming difficulties. If, after time, things are not improved, the DSW may consider resigning from their position.

### Resignation

Not every job is right for everybody. If a DSW is not satisfied with their position or wishes to terminate the position for some other serious reason, DSWs must advise the disability practitioner of this in writing no less than two weeks in advance of leaving the job, that is, giving at least 2 weeks' notice.

### Exit interview

Even if the reason for resigning was a career move or due to circumstances outside their control (e.g. finished their own course, taking up a full time job or moving interstate), the resigned DSW can be a big help to their colleagues and the disability practitioner.

An exit interview with the disability practitioner allows DSWs to really 'tell it how it was' and give an honest evaluation of the good and the not-so-good aspects of the work. Hopefully, DSWs may also have some suggestions about how things could be improved. This gives the disability practitioner /manager an opportunity to review recruitment, selection, induction and orientation, remuneration and management policies and procedures and, if relevant, learn about the factors which contributed to the person leaving. From this knowledge, the disability practitioner should be able ensure that other DSWs have a more rewarding experience in the field.

### Employment agreement

The disability practitioner/ manager and a newly employed DSW may wish to confirm their discussions by developing and signing an employment agreement similar to this one.

## Information and Orientation Guidelines for Disability Support Workers in Post Secondary Education and Training

---

### Disability Support Worker Employment Agreement

I, ..... have read and understood the Information and Orientation Guidelines for Disability Support Workers in post secondary Education. I agree to abide by the general and specific points regarding roles, supporting functions and inappropriate tasks guidelines contained within and with relevant policies of the employing institution/ agency. If at any time during my employment I am unclear about a particular work-related situation, I will discuss the matter with the disability practitioner (and, if appropriate, include the client in discussions) before proceeding.

Signature: .....Disability Support Worker

I, ..... have witnessed the DSW's signature and, on behalf of my institution/agency, I undertake to abide by the general and specific points regarding staff support and management set out in the Information and Orientation Guidelines for Disability Support Workers in Tertiary Education and with relevant policies of the employing institution/ agency. If at any time during the DSW's employment I am unclear about a particular work-related situation, I will discuss the matter with the DSW (and, if appropriate, include the client in discussions) before proceeding.

Signature: .....Disability Liaison Officer/Manager

Date: ..... / ..... / .....

## Appendices

### Appendix I: Personal attributes and performance evaluation checklists

The following checklists may be used to rate an applicant or employee on a number of attributes or as a framework for reference check questions put to an applicant's former employer or referee.

Personal attributes checklist	Rating: 1 = very poor 3 = average 5 = very good
Friendly, positive manner	1 2 3 4 5
Punctuality	1 2 3 4 5

**Information and Orientation Guidelines for Disability Support Workers in Post  
Secondary Education and Training**

Reliability	1 2 3 4 5
Thoroughness	1 2 3 4 5
Organisation and efficiency	1 2 3 4 5
Listening and communication skills	1 2 3 4 5
Understanding of disability issues generally	1 2 3 4 5
Ability to accept criticism	1 2 3 4 5
Caring and consideration	1 2 3 4 5
Manner towards particular clients	1 2 3 4 5
Willingness to work as a team member	1 2 3 4 5
Commitment to their job	1 2 3 4 5

Performance evaluation checklist	Rating: 1 = very poor 3 = average 5 = very good
Establishes and maintains sensitive, effective communication with client	1 2 3 4 5
Respects their client's need for independence and self-determination	1 2 3 4 5
Supports their client in reaching their goals	1 2 3 4 5
Ascertains their client's wishes regarding the execution of tasks	1 2 3 4 5
Ensures that their client's decisions and instructions about services are implemented	1 2 3 4 5
Seeks client's opinions and feedback	1 2 3 4 5

## **Information and Orientation Guidelines for Disability Support Workers in Post Secondary Education and Training**

regarding the quality and effectiveness of services	
Ensures that their client's opinions and feedback regarding services are acted upon	1 2 3 4 5
Relates to their client as a valued individual	1 2 3 4 5

These checklists were developed by Amanda Washington from (1) the results of a survey of students receiving disability support services in first semester 1999 and (2) a performance evaluation form used by the Yooralla Society.

### **Acknowledgments**

This document has been adapted by ADCET Project Team from the original document "Information and Orientation Guidelines for Disability Support Workers in Post Secondary Education and Training", produced by Amanda Washington and Gillian Bruce 1999

### **Acknowledgements from Information and Orientation Guidelines for Disability Support Workers in Post Secondary Education and Training**

Disability Liaison Officers in a many TAFE institutes and universities throughout the state provided valuable written material and facilitated the distribution of the student survey questionnaires. Their assistance and support is greatly appreciated. Officers from a number of community agencies and organisations also participated in interviews and shared their experience and knowledge. Their contribution is gratefully acknowledged. Finally, sincere thanks are extended to the many students who responded to the questionnaire - their responses were inspiring.

Funding for this project was provided by The Commonwealth Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA), Higher Education Equity Program through the Victorian Co-Operative Projects for Higher Education Students with a Disability Committee.

Copyright for the Guidelines rests with the Victorian Co-Operative Projects for Higher Education Students with a Disability Committee but this has been waived. These guidelines are available in print and also in electronic format so that Disability Liaison Officers can, if they wish, adapt parts to suit their particular institution within the tertiary education and training environment.

## **Information and Orientation Guidelines for Disability Support Workers in Post Secondary Education and Training**

---

The project was conducted under the auspices of the Regional Disability Liaison Office of Victoria and supervised and co-written by Gillian Bruce, Regional Disability Liaison Officer (RDLO), B.A, B.SW (Melbourne University) and Dip.Ed.Couns. (RMIT University). The Project Officer and primary author was Amanda Washington - B.A (Monash University). Amanda has lived with severe Rheumatoid Arthritis since she was 2 years old. While studying at Monash University, she was actively involved as a student representative on the Monash University Advisory Committee for People with Disabilities (MUACPD) and was instrumental in forming the MUACPD Library Working Party which reported on an evaluation of library access on all campuses.

### **References**

- Anderson, E and Madden, J EDT011: Role Definition and Responsibilities, EDT012: Attitudes and Values, EDT013: Disabling Factors and Needs, EDT014: Meeting Individual Needs, Education Industry Traineeships: Integration Aide Stream, Education Industry Training Company and South West Institute of TAFE, (Warrnambool, Victoria, 1996)
- Attendant Care Australia, Job Description Overview and Information Sheets
- Australian Deaf Council, Hearing Loss - Assisting Deaf and Hearing Impaired Students: A Guide for Lecturers and Tutors in Post Secondary Settings
- Australian Sign Language Interpreters Association, Code of Ethics
- Box Hill Institute of TAFE Disability Liaison Unit Support Worker Job Descriptions and Guidelines, 1998.
- Bruce, G Alternative Arrangements for Assessment in Higher Education, In Press, 1999.
- Carroll, H Teaching Deaf and Hearing Impaired Students in TAFE Classrooms, Northern Melbourne Institute of TAFE
- Commonwealth Rehabilitation Services, Guidelines on Interpreters
- Eastern TAFE Melbourne, "Disability Support Services" booklet, "Disability Support Staff - Employment Responsibilities", "Individual Support Plan" form, "Student Profile Form", "Support Guidelines", 1998.
- East Gippsland Institute of TAFE "Policy for Students with Special Needs" and "Student Support Services" brochures.
- Fink, Dr. R "Colorado Documentation Guidelines for Head Injury/ Traumatic Brain Injury",
- Goulburn Ovens Institute of TAFE, "Casual (Student Support Worker) Process to be Followed" documents, Guidelines for Student Support Services: A user guide for Support Staff, Students and Institute Teaching Staff, 1998.

## **Information and Orientation Guidelines for Disability Support Workers in Post Secondary Education and Training**

---

Interact Attendant Care Services brochure, 1998.

Karen McKenzie, Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind: Student Handbook for Adults who are Blind or Vision Impaired, 2nd Ed., 1992.

Monash University, "Notetaker Guidelines for Hearing Impaired Students", "Notetaking Service: Terms and Conditions", 1997.

Northern Melbourne Institute of TAFE "Notetaker/Scribe Duty Statement", "Participation Assistant Duty Statement", "Procedure for Processing Timecards", "Sign Language Interpreter Duty Statement", "Support Staff Roles and Responsibilities", "Tutor Duty Statement", 1998.

RMIT University Disability Liaison Unit Professional Standards for Interpreting in Tertiary Education, 1999.

Sunraysia Institute of TAFE Job Descriptions and Guidelines for Integration Aids, Notetakers, Tutorial Assistants and Tutors, 1998.

Swinburne University model position descriptions

<http://www.swin.edu.au/stuserv/disability/forms/WorkingwithDSWs.doc> for Disability Support Workers otherwise called notetakers, readers, scribes/amanuensis, educational aides, mobility guides, attendants, carers and participation assistants.

Victorian Deaf Society "Communicating With Deaf People", "How Not to Say 'I Beg Your Pardon'", "Ten Ways to Improve Listening", and "Working with an AUSLAN Interpreter" information sheets, 1998.

Victorian Notetakers Association, "Guidelines for Notetaking Services"

Yooralla Society of Victoria "Disability Support Worker - Position Description" and Attachment to Position Description