

Accessibility and inclusion in outdoor education and recreation

A guide for outdoor providers and educators



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Image source: Parafed Waikato, Try Watersports Day

Introduction

In Aotearoa New Zealand, we are surrounded by an outstanding natural environment. It is vital that all tamariki and rangatahi have the opportunity to access these outdoor spaces, regardless of their age, gender, sexuality, location, ethnicity or ability. This will foster a lifelong connection to the whenua and enhance their overall quality of life.

This resource helps to break down barriers (both real and perceived) for disabled tamariki and rangatahi by supporting providers and educators to make outdoor experiences more inclusive and accessible.

This guidance has been created by [Sport New Zealand Ihi Aotearoa](#), [Education Outdoors New Zealand](#) and [Recreation Aotearoa](#), along with various outdoor recreation and education experts. Our aim is to make outdoor experiences more inclusive and accessible for disabled tamariki and rangatahi by providing tools and information for outdoor providers and educators.

This guidance has been informed by frameworks, knowledge and information specific to the local context. We acknowledge and celebrate the role of mātauranga Māori (Māori knowledge), Te Tiriti o Waitangi and te ao Māori (the Māori world).



Image source: Halberg Foundation, Halberg Outdoor Recreation Camp

“

Having these experiences for our kids is huge. Our kids miss out on so much, they want to be involved, they want to be in the outdoors. They want to be doing what every other child their age is doing. Any support, big or little, makes such a difference in the lives of our children!

Parent on an inclusive camp with [Whenua Iti Outdoors](#)

”

Disability in Aotearoa New Zealand

One in four New Zealanders identify as disabled, including 11% of young people under the age of 15.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities defines disability as a long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairment.

These impairments, combined with various barriers, can prevent people from fully participating in society. This definition sees disability not as an *identity* but, rather, as people's experience of their impairments and the barriers they face, and is referred to as the **social model of disability**.

This is in contrast to the previously accepted **medical model of disability**, which suggests a person's impairment is the barrier and, therefore, the impairment is what is in need of 'fixing'.

Outdoor education and recreation practitioners can use the social model of disability to focus on removing barriers in activities, rather than assuming accommodations are impossible, as the medical model suggests.



11%

of young people under the age of 15 identify as disabled.

People's experience of disability is highly varied and can be influenced by the:

- nature of their impairment
- types of barriers they face, which can be compounded by their gender, age, ethnicity and culture.

Many impairments are invisible and can't be easily identified by others, and some people who experience an impairment may not identify as being disabled.

Disability occurs when:

- people with impairments are excluded from places and activities most of us take for granted
- infrastructure and systems do not accommodate their diverse abilities and needs
- people's attitudes prevent people with impairments from being able to participate in society on an equal basis with non-disabled people.



Learn more about the social model and the medical model of disability

Just over half of all disabled people in New Zealand experience more than one type of impairment. Common types of impairment include the following:



Walking, lifting or bending



Using your hands to hold, grasp or use objects



Learning, concentrating or remembering



Hearing, even when using a hearing aid



Seeing, even when wearing glasses or contact lens



Communication, mixing with others or socialising

Disability in sport and recreation

The **Active NZ survey** captures the responses of more than 30,000 New Zealanders and allows us to understand more about the experiences of disabled people when it comes to participating in sport and recreation. From this survey, we know the following:

Disabled young people are much less likely to be confident or consider themselves to be good at physical activity than non-disabled people.

49%

of disabled people agree: I feel confident to take part in physical activity, compared to 70% non-disabled people

55%

of disabled people agree: I'm good at lots of different physical activities, compared to 72% non-disabled people

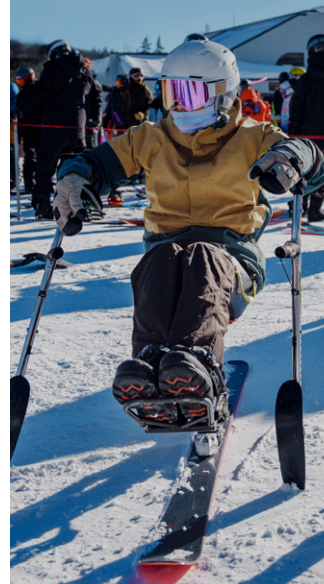


Image source: Halberg Foundation, Halberg Outdoor Recreation Camp

Source: Active NZ data, 2023

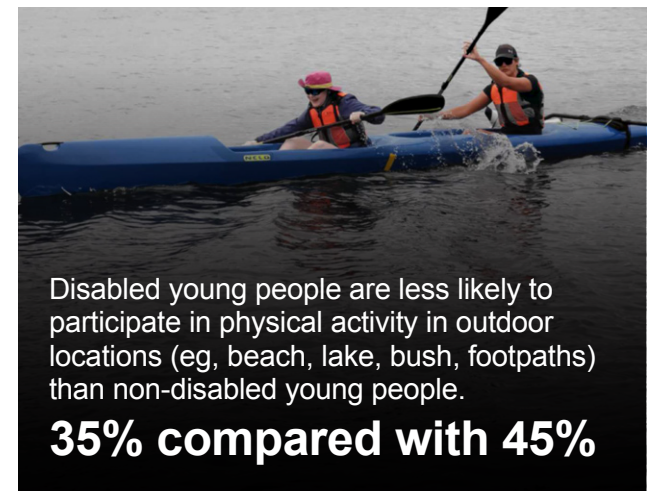
66%

of disabled young people would like to be more physically active.



1 in 5

disabled young people would like to try or do more tramping or bush walks.



Disabled young people are less likely to participate in physical activity in outdoor locations (eg, beach, lake, bush, footpaths) than non-disabled young people.

35% compared with 45%

Image source: Blind Sport New Zealand, Wāhine Retreat

Disability language

When talking about disability, it is important to be aware of the language we use, its historical and social context and how this may affect a person's sense of inclusion. Some people may experience fear and anxiety around using the 'correct' language.



Image source: Whenua Iti Outdoors

This guidance aims to reduce or remove that anxiety by providing information about commonly used words and terms.

- 'Disabled people' or 'people with impairments' is currently accepted best practice in Aotearoa New Zealand.
- 'Tangata whaikaha' is a term that has been embraced by some disabled Māori. 'Whaikaha' is a strength-based word that means 'to have ability' or 'to be enabled'.
- Always be respectful of individual language preferences.
- If in doubt, use the language of the person with lived experience.
- Language is ever evolving, continue to learn and respond to change.

'Disabled person' versus 'Person with a disability'

For this resource, we use 'disabled person' rather than 'person with a disability'. The term 'disabled person' is used by Whaikaha – the Ministry of Disabled People, and acknowledges the social model of disability. This states that a person does not **have** a disability, they have an impairment. An impairment only becomes a disability when a person is unable to participate fully in society due to physical, social or systemic barriers. Therefore, people are 'disabled' by society's inability to cater to their needs.

“

The biggest thing I've learned this week is that it's not a bad thing to be disabled. This week I've become more confident in talking to a group of people and being myself. Going forward I want to remember how good I felt about myself this week at camp and stay strong!

”

Participant from the Halberg Foundation's Outdoor Recreation Camp

Diversity, equity and inclusion

Diversity

Diversity includes the different characteristics, backgrounds and perspectives that people bring. When organisations reflect the communities they serve, they can better understand and meet the needs of those communities. Increasing diversity often requires specific actions to address existing and historical inequalities, like actively encouraging disabled people to apply for a role.

Equity

Equity means recognising that people start from different places in society and those who have faced disadvantages might need extra help to get fair outcomes. Simply providing equal support may not be enough for everyone to succeed.

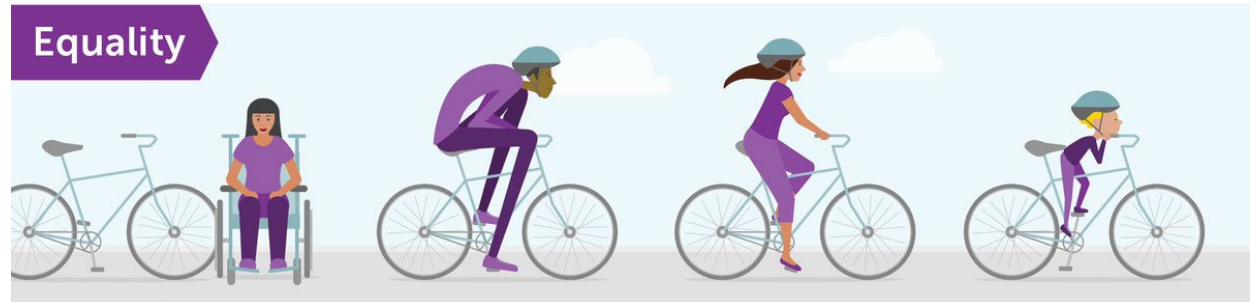
Justice involves fixing the root problems and removing the barriers that cause inequity.

Inclusion

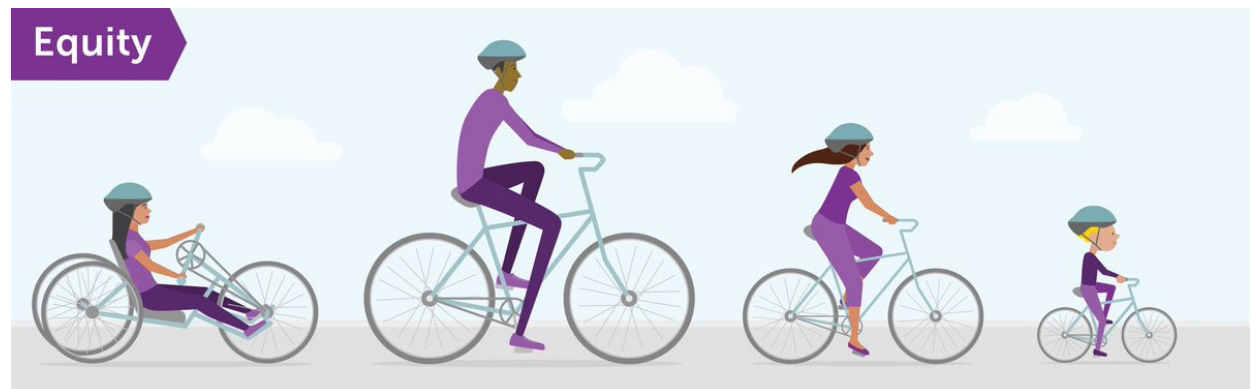
Inclusion means creating a space where everyone, especially underserved and marginalised groups, feels welcome, safe and able to participate fully. It involves taking active steps and offering choices that ensure everyone feels they belong.



Learn more about diversity, equity and inclusion



The assumption is that **everyone benefits from the same supports**. This is equal treatment.



Everyone gets the supports they need (this is the concept of “affirmative action”), thus producing equity.

Image source: Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

Important considerations for inclusion

This section contains guidance on frameworks and policies to support inclusion.



Being inclusive does not mean you have to have all of the answers. It's about creating safe, welcoming environments and valuing each participant as an individual.

Everyone's experience of disability is different, so it's important never to make assumptions about what is and isn't accessible. Respecting the individual's experience and involving them in the decision-making process is essential for designing an experience that will work for them.

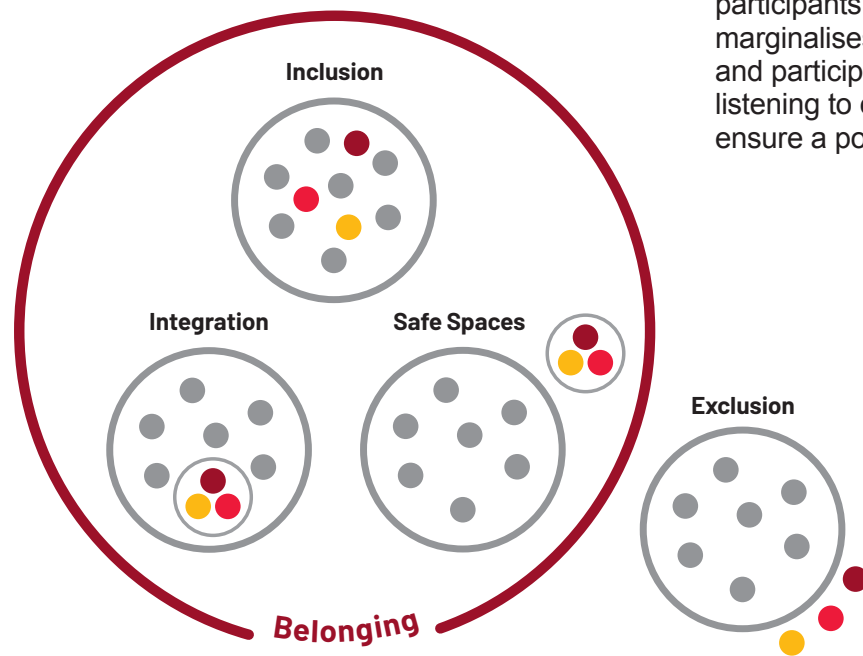


Diagram showing different ways to help participants feel a sense of belonging.

There are different ways to help participants feel a sense of belonging - what matters most is providing choices and asking what works best for them:

- **Inclusion** is when you create spaces and activities that allow everyone to participate together.
- **Integration** is when participants with individual needs are included in the mainstream setting but the environment or activity is adapted specifically for them.
- **Safe spaces** are tailored environments outside of the mainstream setting that cater to participants.

When none of these choices are given, participants are excluded. Exclusion marginalises individuals denying them access and participation. By providing choice and listening to everyone's individual needs, we can ensure a positive experience for all participants.



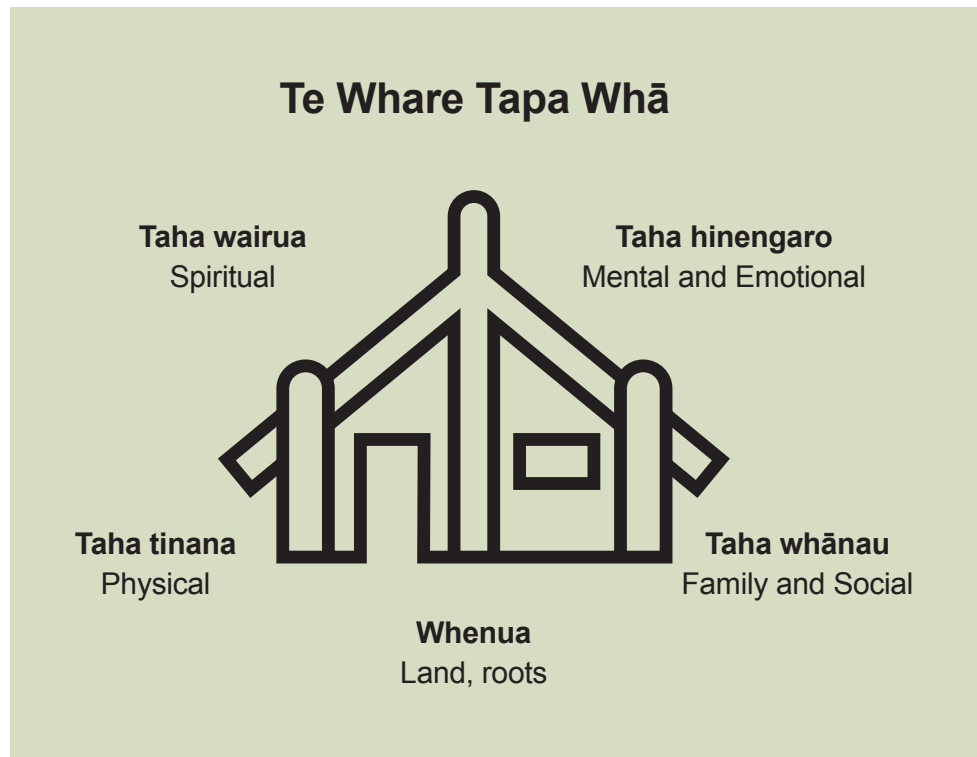
Image source: Blind Sport New Zealand, Wāhine Retreat

Guiding frameworks and mindsets

You can use the following frameworks as guidance in being more inclusive of disabled people. Start small, learn and build from here.

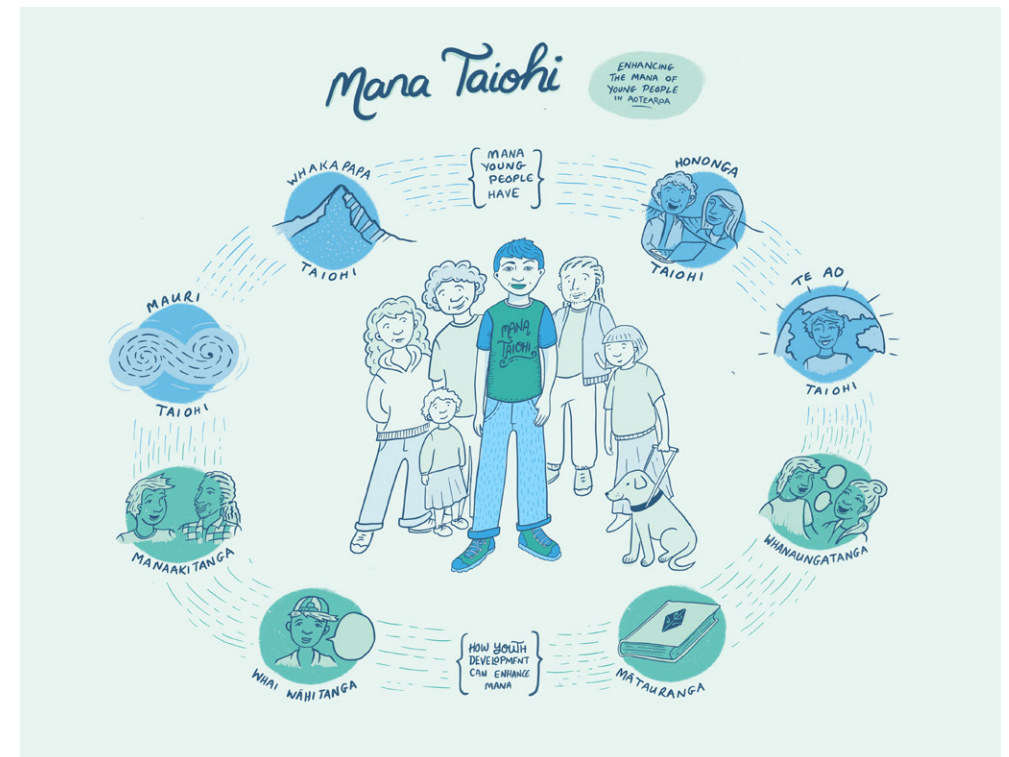
Understand hauora (holistic wellbeing) through Te Whare Tapa Whā

Te Whare Tapa Whā, created by Sir Mason Durie, is a Māori wellbeing model that emphasises the balance of different aspects of a person's wellbeing. The model likens wellbeing to a house that stands strong only when all parts are balanced, with the whenua (land) as its foundation, highlighting the importance of a strong connection to the land.



Apply a person-centred approach through Mana Taiohi

Mana Taiohi, developed by Ara Taiohi, is a framework of eight interconnected principles that inform how we can work with young people to uplift their mana (intrinsic value and authority). It centres the individual and encourages us to recognise their mana by considering their mauri (life spark), whakapapa (heritage), hononga (connections) and te ao (world). These principles help guide positive youth development in Aotearoa New Zealand, including in outdoor activities.



Advocate for recreation as a human right with United Nations Article 30

Article 30 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities states that disabled people have the right to take part in recreational, leisure and sporting activities. This right should be supported by encouraging disabled children and young people to engage in mainstream activities to the fullest extent possible.

Recognise and respond to different types of ableism

Ableism is the discrimination against disabled people due to biases that favour able-bodied individuals. It can range from hostile ableism, such as aggressive behaviour and exclusion, to benevolent ableism, which sees disabled people as weak or in need of rescue, undermining their autonomy. Some forms of ableism are subtle and deeply ingrained in society, making them difficult to address.

A recent study from Massey University found that ableist attitudes are a major barrier to young people participating in sports and recreation. Addressing these attitudes could significantly increase participation by removing these barriers.

Champion self-determination through Enabling Good Lives

Enabling Good Lives is an equity framework designed to give disabled people more choice and control over the support they receive and how they live their lives. Created by disabled people, it aims to shift power to them. The framework is based on the following eight principles.

Self-determination

Disabled people are in control of their lives.

Beginning early

Be aspirational for disabled children in building community and independence.

Person-centred

Tailor support to individual needs and goals.

Ordinary life outcomes

Disabled people are supported to live an everyday life in everyday places and are regarded as citizens.

Mainstream first

Disabled people are supported to access mainstream services before specialist disability services.

Mana enhancing

The abilities and contributions of disabled people and their families are recognised and respected.

Easy to use

Disabled people have supports that are simple to use and flexible.

Relationship building

Supports available to build and strengthen relationships between disabled people, their whānau and community.



Image source: Duke of Edinburgh Award, Wellington East Girls' College programme

Organisational policies

By developing and sharing a diversity, equity and inclusion policy you will help everyone in your organisation understand how they can contribute to an inclusive environment.

This may require open conversations within your organisation to address attitudes or beliefs that restrict access to outdoor education or activities for some people.

Diversity, equity and inclusion policy templates

- For recreation organisations, view the [Sport NZ DEI policy template policy](#).
- For education providers, view the [information for schools about legal obligations for inclusion](#).

As well as policies, your safety systems and processes should be inclusive and address the relevant supports needed. Useful templates can be found on [page 30](#), 'Safety systems and processes'.



Image source: Recreate NZ Youth Camp programme with First Step Outdoors

Inclusion training

Building staff confidence by providing training will allow diversity, equity and inclusion policies to be more successful and meaningfully implemented in your organisation.

Here are some options to consider:

Halberg inclusion training

The Halberg Foundation offers in-person training to help schools and recreation organisations create inclusive environments.

Sport tutor inclusion training

A free online module for sport and recreation organisations to learn about inclusion as a response to discrimination.

Adventure Works Inclusion Practices for Outdoor Leaders Micro-credential

A part-time qualification over eight weeks, with online learning and a face-to-face workshop.

Education presentations by Makingtrax Foundation

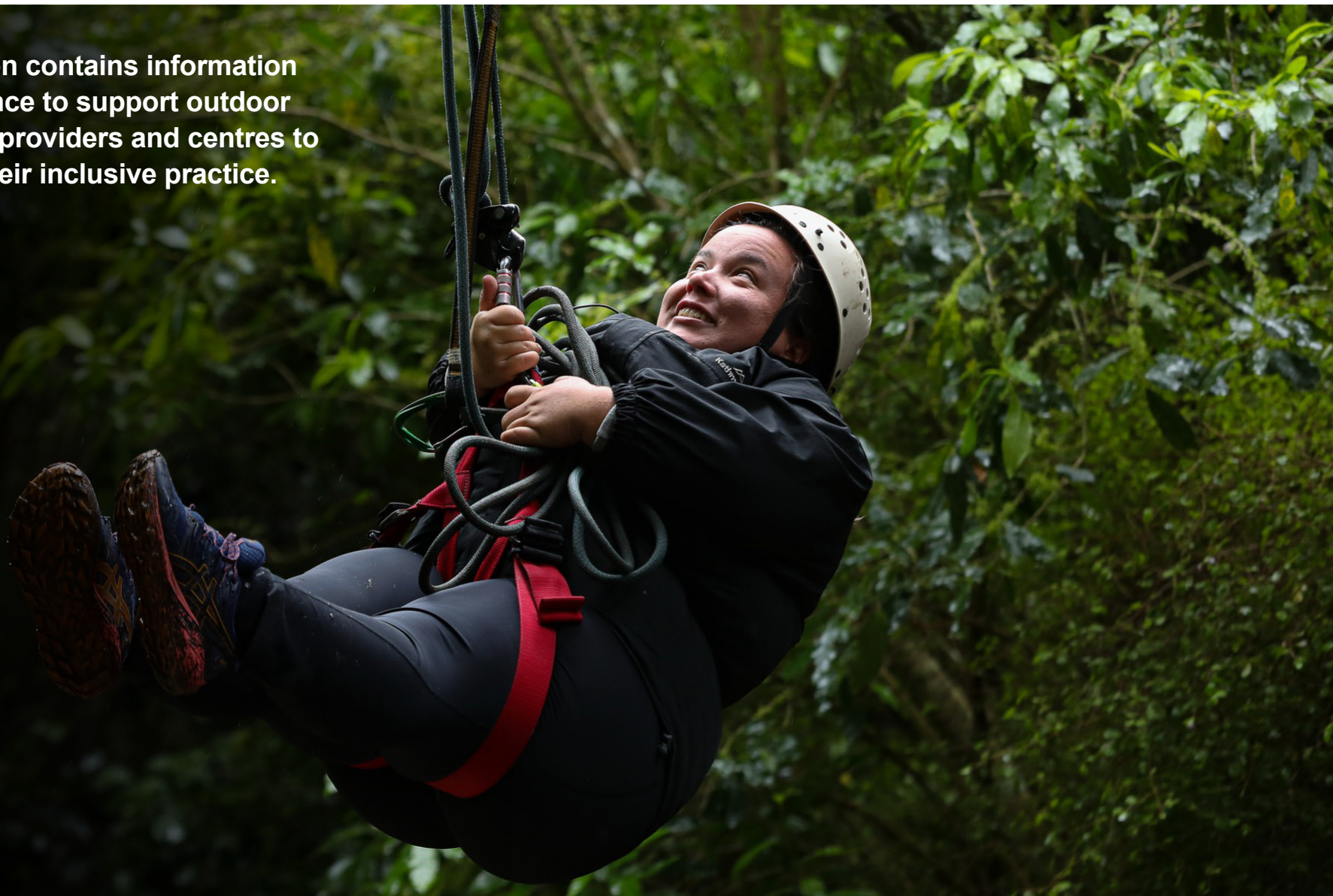
Independent organisation Makingtrax provides customised online and in-person presentations to promote inclusion in adventure tourism and travel.



Image source: Halberg Foundation, Halberg Outdoor Recreation Camp

For outdoor providers

This section contains information and guidance to support outdoor recreation providers and centres to improve their inclusive practice.



Websites and marketing

For many individuals, schools and community groups, visiting your website is the first engagement they will have with your organisation.

Try to ensure your website is welcoming, digitally accessible, and contains clear information about what you can offer.

The following resources can support organisations to improve their website accessibility.

The Venture Outdoors Toolkit to Success

An initiative from [Outscape](#) supporting outdoor providers to create accessible websites and publications.

How to design an accessible website

A guide developed by DreamHost.

Sport NZ has produced guidance on creating [accessible documents](#), to support sport and recreation organisations to develop clear documents for participants, including information on how to add alternative text to images.

Inclusive intent

Including information about your organisation's inclusive intent on your website and promotional material lets potential participants, community groups, schools and kura know you're proactive in your approach to supporting all people to participate.

This can be achieved by developing a statement of inclusive intent, an accessibility statement or an inclusivity page on your website. It may also be useful to link to your DEI policy (see [page 12](#)). Examples of outdoor providers showcasing their inclusive intent are given below:

Adventure Works

[Making Outdoor Education Inclusive](#)

Outward Bound

[About Us](#) and [Adapted Courses](#).



Image source: Halberg Foundation, Halberg Outdoor Recreation Camp

How to develop a statement of inclusive intent:

Be open and honest

Acknowledge where you are in your inclusivity journey and communicate this clearly. It's OK to be at the start of your journey.

Set realistic expectations

You don't have to promise the world, just state your commitment to inclusivity and describe what you are currently doing in this area.

Specify your services

Clearly state what services you offer and to whom, so people can make informed decisions about their own participation.

Provide examples

Share examples of groups you've supported and mention any adaptive equipment you have, or instructor training you have completed.

Highlight feedback

Use testimonials and reviews to demonstrate your commitment to inclusivity.

Commit to continually learning

Show your dedication to understanding more about the individuals you're wanting to include by offering site visits, pre-meetings, and collaborating with other organisations for support, such as the [Halberg Foundation](#).



Image source: Halberg Foundation, Halberg Outdoor Recreation Camp

Marketing images

If you have an inclusive programme or are delivering an activity for specific impairments, show this in your promotional material, to give participants confidence.

Aim for positive, empowering images of people with a range of impairment types, participating in different activities, so that as many people as possible can feel represented in your organisation.

Consider the following:

Alt text

Include descriptive alt text in all images on websites, flyers and published material.

Social media

Include all relevant information from flyers in the body of social media posts, not just in the image.

Design

Flyers should be uncluttered, use plain language and have good colour contrast.

Registration forms

Registration forms help you understand and meet the needs of participants. Use these prompts to gather the right types of information.

Registration forms are not a medical information-gathering exercise

Instead, ask how to keep the participant safe and happy, and how to create quality and empowering experiences. You do not need specific information about a person's impairment.

Ask strengths-based questions

Phrase questions to highlight how to create a great experience for the participant, rather than focusing on their impairment.

Customise your forms

Tailor registration forms to your organisation and the specific activity, considering necessary information, risks, hazards and support.

Ask everyone

Ask about accessibility needs for everyone, not just those with visible impairments. Anyone could have preferences that would enhance their experience.

Examples:

Adventure Works

Functional ability questionnaire.

Recreate NZ

Become a participant form for young people with an intellectual impairment.

Once you have received the participant information, remember to allow time to develop a clear plan that responds to the needs of your participants. This will need to outline how you will work together with that person and their community group, school and/or whānau to ensure they are supported. This might include changes to equipment, location, timing, or the staff required, so planning is vital.



Image source: Halberg Foundation, Halberg Outdoor Recreation Camp

Clear communication

Providing one point of contact (with a phone number) can be helpful, because participants and/or their support networks may have questions or concerns they would prefer to talk through in advance.



Image source: Blind Sport New Zealand, Wāhine Retreat

Communication before the activity

Share the full experience

Provide details about the entire journey, including arrival and orientation, not just the main activity.

Provide opportunities for orientation

Allow time for participants to orient themselves to new environments and identify boundaries, trip hazards, equipment and distances. This helps maintain the participant's autonomy.

Use visual aids

Where possible, offer video introductions, site maps and images to help participants prepare. This will also help schools and groups in creating social stories.

Simplify your gear lists

Use plain language and include pictures with captions explaining the equipment needed.

Provide programme timings

Share schedules in advance, including break times and meals. This is important for participants who need to manage their energy levels or plan medication around mealtimes. Consider if you can be flexible with these times if needed.

Consider non-verbal communication

Check you have understood the participants' needs and planned how to communicate during the session. For example, if you'll communicate with a thumbs up rather than verbally, maintaining a good line of sight during the activity is vital.

Create a list of FAQs

A list of frequently asked questions about your activity can help with communication and support future interactions with schools and community groups.

Communication during the activity

Display a clear plan or timetable

Have a visible timetable with pictures and visual aids for participants to follow and engage with.

Communicate changes promptly

Try to stick to the agreed plan, but if changes are necessary, communicate these as soon as possible. This information is particularly important for participants who are managing their energy levels or taking medication. Flexibility may be required to ensure the safety of participants, such as allowing some participants to break sooner.

Use various communication styles

This could include visual aids for instructions, such as coloured tape for positioning or cue cards for guidance. Tactile modelling can be helpful for people with a visual impairment, allowing them to feel the action and understand how to move their body.



Proactive communication

As a provider, you usually meet the ākonga (students) only after they have arrived at your facility. This means you might not know if anyone has been left behind by their school or kura due to assumptions about their needs. You can change this by proactively encouraging schools to include everyone.

Providers can also contact local disability groups directly to promote their inclusive programmes. These groups can also help distribute information to potential participants and their whānau. See 'Resources' on [page 32](#), for potential partner organisations.

Proactively sharing what you offer will build confidence in your ability to provide quality experiences, making it easier for groups to collaborate with you.

Build trust.

Establishing trust with individuals or organisations may take time, especially if they have had negative past experiences with providers. Having clear and accessible information available will help them feel more confident about what you can offer.

Clarify roles and resources.

Clearly outline what you provide (eg, beach wheelchair, accessible location) and what schools and/or community groups need to provide (eg, accessible transport) to set clear expectations.

Highlight funding opportunities.

Inform schools and community groups if you have funding available to help cover costs. See [page 31](#), for more details.

“

Sailing helps to give me confidence and I feel a part of a small community of positive, fun people. On the water I am just the same as everyone else. I like my coach, and we have signals and our own way of communicating. Over the last couple of years while on the water and with no aids to help me hear at all, it is something that I am used to, and was very much my normal. But after been given the opportunity to try the Milo Action Communicator, it showed me what I was missing and this was a life changing feeling. It makes being on the water even more exciting.

Stella Robson, secondary school student on sailing with a hearing impairment and how technology supports her communication

”

Tailoring your activities

When deciding how to deliver your activity, remember there is no 'one size fits all' approach to working with disabled people. Even if two people have similar impairments, they may have very different levels of experience, comfort and confidence that affect how they would like to participate. Taking a person-centred approach (see the Mana Taiohi framework on page 10) will help you to plan for the individual and not the impairment.

Involve participants in designing the solutions

When addressing barriers, the disabled person and their support networks are the experts. It is important to work with them, rather than assume what is and isn't a barrier to participation.

The video 'assume that I can':

This video highlights how negative assumptions about what's possible for disabled people can often limit someone's experience.

Adventure and the 'right to risk'

Taking considered risks is an important part of the human experience. In the outdoors, positive risk taking contributes to an overall sense of adventure that promotes wellbeing and can lead to an increase in confidence.

Positive risk taking (or risk enablement) is linked to the concept of self-determination (see the Enabling Good Lives framework on [page 11](#)), which asserts that disabled people should be in control of how they participate. Another concept used in outdoor recreation is the [challenge by choice](#) philosophy, which empowers people to personalise how they participate in an activity.

Prior communication about the types of activities and choices available is vital, so people with impairments can be empowered to make decisions that are best for them.

Balancing risk and safety

Your approach to risk management should be the same for all participants, regardless of their ability. Find the acceptable level of risk for participants to experience a degree of challenge. When adapting activities to better suit the needs of participants, consider if that adaptation still provides **equity** in the level of challenge it presents. For example, the safest way to support a person with an impairment when kayaking may be to use a tandem kayak. However, a single kayak with outriggers would still offer additional support while maintaining independence. Both options could be good adaptations, it depends on the individual, the environment and the situational risks and hazards as to what solution is best.

“

This week has been awesome. Better than I could have ever expected to be honest. I've made a lot of new friends and a lot of memories that will last me a lifetime. The abseiling and the high ropes were my favourite activities because I saw how I'm capable of getting out of my comfort zone. I want to continue to step out of my comfort zone more and more and have fun no matter what.

Participant from the [Halberg Foundation's](#) Outdoor Recreation Camp

”

Prioritising whanaungatanga and building rapport

Allowing time for whanaungatanga and relationship building with participants and their whānau will let you make better adaptation recommendations and help them to feel more comfortable in what might be an unfamiliar situation. Useful questions to ask include the following:

- What's their idea of 'success' in this activity or experience?
- What excites them, and what would they like to try?
- How do they feel and react in certain environments, such as water or heights?
- Do they have any specific triggers to avoid or methods for de-escalation?

STEP model

The STEP model is a framework that supports the inclusion of disabled people by suggesting four variables to consider when designing your activities. Try to approach each of the variables with flexibility and creativity when seeking out possible solutions. Remember that involving the participants when discussing potential adaptations will support better results.

Consider how you could adapt the following.

- S** **Space**, or environment, including the surface, surroundings, size of the area or any visual or audible distractions.
- T** **Task**, or the way the activity is completed, including the time allocated, distance to be covered, speed, pace, group configuration or type of movement.
- E** **Equipment**, including specialised equipment with a modified shape, weight, texture, added balance or support, sound or colour.
- P** **People** and how you work with those involved in this activity, including the number of staff, size of the group(s) and whether you use a buddy system or the support of teachers or whānau.

STEP model in action

Activity

Paddle boarding at the beach.

Group

Year 8 ākonga, including students with a range of impairments.

Space

The session has been moved to a quieter area of the beach to make communication with students easier. The location has been chosen due to its closeness to public facilities, including accessible toilets.

Task

More time has been allocated for students to get ready and for the activity to be explained. Two options will be available for the distance covered and time spent on the water, allowing students to manage their energy levels.

Equipment

Full-length wetsuits have been provided for students who have difficulty regulating their body temperature. Extra-wide paddle boards are available to offer greater stability for students who would like this option. A beach wheelchair has been hired from the local council and an adapted paddle board with seat and outriggers has been allocated for a student who uses a wheelchair. See more on adaptive equipment on [page 22](#).

People

Teachers are participating to support the group, and a buddy system is being used, allowing students to receive support and encouragement from their peers rather than defaulting to adult intervention.

Icebreakers

Set an inclusive tone from the start of your activity by using icebreakers and warm-up games that are accessible to everyone. This fosters an inclusive environment and helps build group rapport. The STEP model can help to adapt existing games or can be used to create new inclusive ones from scratch.



Equipment

The range of adaptive equipment is growing to enhance accessibility in outdoor activities. Start by contacting your supplier(s) to see what they offer. Consider these common types of adaptive equipment.

Safety harness with extra padding and support

This can make activities more accessible and comfortable for people who require more support with core stability.

Adaptive climbing equipment

This can include chest harnesses, seat harnesses and pulley systems that allow for self-controlled ascent.

Outriggers for kayaks and paddle boards

These provide flexibility because they can be fitted to different equipment to increase stability as needed.

Seated support harnesses

Provide extra support for activities in seated positions such as sailing and sea kayaking.

Extra-wide paddle boards

Offer increased stability and the option for staff to help participants while on the same paddle board.

Tandem kayaks

These tend to be wider and more stable than single-person kayaks, while also offering options for assistance.

Adaptive bikes and mountain bikes

Various options are available, including e-bikes, tandem bikes (which provide an option for blind or visually impaired participants), trikes, handcycles and more.

All-terrain and specialised wheelchairs

A wide range is available, suitable for activities like bush walking, hiking, jogging and beach trips.

Cost

Some adaptive equipment can be expensive to purchase. Check what you can borrow or rent in your region, and ask participants and whānau to see what they may own or know about. Contact local councils to find out about publicly available outdoor equipment, such as beach wheelchairs, pool wheelchairs, hoists, beach mats and adapted paddle boards.

[Click here for council contact information about hiring adaptive water-based equipment.](#)

Specialised equipment isn't always necessary, and 'makeshift' solutions can make a huge difference. Work with your participants to understand what will have the biggest effect. This could be as simple as adding foam padding to a backrest or painting something in a higher contrast colour. Note that safety considerations are paramount, and makeshift adaptations should never be made to vital safety equipment, such as harnesses.



Image source: Halberg Foundation, Halberg Outdoor Recreation Camp

Specialist organisations and adaptive equipment suppliers

Beachwheels NZ

Suppliers of a range of wheelchairs, carts and accessories.

Adapt MTB

A community for adaptive mountain bikers and their whānau.

Adaptive Skiing and Snowsports

A list of options and providers available in and around Queenstown.

Adaptive Surfing New Zealand

Information on adaptive equipment, have-a-go days, events and competitive pathways.

Makingtrax Foundation

Sells a range of harnesses suitable for various activities.

New Zealand Riding for the Disabled

A member-associated organisation of over 40 riding groups in local communities throughout Aotearoa New Zealand.

Paddle Able

Developing an inclusive paddle community by working with clubs and providers, offering education, resources, systems and equipment.

The ParaFed Network

A group of regional organisations that provide sport and recreation opportunities for disabled people. They loan equipment and deliver sport and recreation within their local regions.

Sailability and Blind Sailing

Non-profit organisations around Aotearoa New Zealand that offer specialist sailing groups.

Considerations for tailoring activities

Make an instructor communication 'toolkit'

Include items to make adaptations on the go, such as a portable whiteboard and marker pen for clear communication, visual cue cards of activities and instructions, coloured tape for marking equipment, and a list of inclusive games and icebreakers.

Plan in advance

Use the STEP model to plan your activity, including the number of staff and time needed, when you'll have breaks, and what adaptive equipment you need.

Practice and prepare a variety of communication styles

Try explaining activities with reduced or broken-down instructions, using visual and tactile modelling or a visual timetable or checklist.

Be mindful of additional health and safety considerations

Keeping warm, eating more regularly, water intake, toileting needs and carrying spare clothing may be more important for the participant or group.

Seek support where needed

Contact other inclusive practitioners to share knowledge and ideas. The chances are, someone has already tried what you're considering. See [page 32](#) for a list of inclusive outdoor organisations.

Overnight camps

Camping in nature with friends, whānau and peers can be hugely beneficial in allowing people to immerse themselves in the outdoors, escape from modern life, build outdoor skills and connect with others. Anyone who wants to should be able to participate in overnight camps. With advanced planning and a few considerations, this can be simple to achieve.



Image source: Duke of Edinburgh Award, Wellington East Girls' College programme

Considerations for inclusive overnight camps

Location is important

Tent setup and orientation are crucial for accessibility. Consider extra space between tents and at entrances for ease of mobility. Determine if some participants need to be closer to toilets or staff or if they would prefer a quieter spot away from social areas.

Choose the right tent for the participant

Participants using wheelchairs may need tents with a flat doorway to allow easy access. Others might benefit from tents with standing room for extra space and assistance. Check with participants to see if they have a tent they are already comfortable using.

Plan for hygiene requirements

If camping far from accessible toilets, you can still create accessible facilities using a fold-up commode, shower chair, portable shower or privacy tent. Consult with participants to understand their needs and preferences. Don't assume they won't participate just because an accessible toilet isn't nearby.

Support a good night's sleep

A raised camping bed or thicker mattresses can make transferring in and out of bed much easier for some participants, as well as being more comfortable.

Make a plan with participants, whānau and caregivers

Clearly communicate sleeping arrangements, food, medication needs, hygiene requirements, emergency contacts and other support needs, to ensure a safe, surprise-free experience.

Aim for all activities to be inclusive

Cooking together and sitting around the campfire are important parts of the camp experience. Where possible, use inclusive seating, table arrangements and evening activities so everyone can take part together.

Accommodate guide dogs

Permitting guide dogs at camps and ensuring they are cared for while participants engage in activities can support inclusion.

“

The scheduled social downtime was awesome, seriously I've been on so many camps that don't allow for that, and it's so important. Getting to break in my braille uno cards in the evening was fun. Getting the choice of bunking alone or in a group was perfect. So, so many important and naturally occurring convos about blind life, including individualised funding and what it's like having a guide dog.

Participant on [Blind Sport New Zealand's](#) Wahine Retreat

”

Reflect and ask for feedback

Commit to continually improving your inclusive practice by reflecting on how an activity or experience has gone and seeking feedback from the participants and their support networks.

This shows you value their lived experiences and will help you refine your approach.

Debriefing with staff allows you to learn from each other, make necessary improvements and identify opportunities for further training and confidence-building.



Image source: Halberg Foundation, Halberg Outdoor Recreation Camp

For schools and educators



This section contains information and guidance to support schools and educators to improve inclusivity in outdoor education.

Making the outdoor classroom accessible for all



Image source: Halberg Foundation, Halberg Outdoor Recreation Camp

You and your school can create life-changing experiences for young people through outdoor recreation.

The Ministry of Education, alongside [Education Outdoors New Zealand](#), strongly encourages inclusive practices in education outside the classroom (EOTC) activities, so all students can participate in enriching learning experiences. This includes engaging in less familiar environments and activities, in a supported way, based on students' comfort levels and skills.

As educators, you should be supported to access professional learning and development on inclusive practice. [Education Outdoors New Zealand](#) offers resources, training and support specifically for the education sector. For information on other professional learning and development opportunities to support your inclusive practice, see 'Resources', on [page 32](#).

Working with ākonga and whānau

Disabled ākonga and their whānau are resourceful and have a different set of lived experiences and perspectives that are beneficial to include when planning, organising and implementing EOTC activities. Ask questions whenever possible, because the ākonga and whānau will have the best knowledge of the support they need. This also provides more autonomy in shaping their own learning experiences. See [page 21](#), 'Prioritising whanaungatanga and building rapport', for prompts around questions to ask.

For some rangatahi and whānau, their impairment may have been caused by a traumatic incident, and conversations might be triggering and evoke protective or fear responses. For some family members, what you are proposing might be something they have previously thought to be too daunting, too overwhelming or too unsafe to achieve. Careful and considered planning with whānau can be the best way to alleviate these fears.



Image source: Whenua Iti Outdoors

“

We would never dream that she would participate in rock climbing, kayaking, walking uphill with a pack on her back, etc. But she did – this certainly speaks volumes for us in terms of how her participation in the Duke of Edinburgh award has changed her.

Parent of a participant on the Duke of Edinburgh's award programme at Wellington East Girls' College for students with additional support needs

”

Advocating for inclusive education outside the classroom

Image source: Halberg Foundation, Halberg Outdoor Recreation Camp



Establish a shared understanding throughout the school and wider school community of the purpose and value of inclusive outdoor education and education outside the classroom (EOTC). Referring to existing case studies (see [page 31](#)) can be useful for introducing people to what is possible and to help shift perceptions about the ability or potential of disabled ākongā.

Working with outdoor providers

Advocacy may also be required when working with outdoor providers. They may be unfamiliar with how to support disabled ākongā, which can lead to a fearful or overly cautious response to enquiries. Site visits, starting with smaller groups, or providing more teacher support can help to gradually build an understanding of what is possible between the provider and the school. However, if you ultimately don't feel supported by the provider, it's time to go elsewhere.

When working with any external provider or outdoor centre, use this [provider agreement form](#) to clarify roles and responsibilities.

“

It is important to get kids, who are usually trailed by aides and parents, into challenging and foreign situations. These opportunities are few and far between for my son because of his school set-up (aides in every class) and our home situation. He wants to be independent – this was an opportunity to go away and challenge himself. When he returned, he was proud, more mature and spoke confidently and comprehensively about his experiences. The stories keep coming.

Parent of a participant on an adapted course with Outward Bound

”

School-based outdoor activities and camps

EOTC doesn't have to involve outdoor providers or even leaving school grounds. School-based outdoor activities can help build ākonga confidence in a familiar setting before exploring further. This approach is often more effective than one-off activities because it helps normalise new outdoor experiences.

Education Outdoors New Zealand's [Revisoning School Camps training](#) supports teachers to confidently develop place-responsive and student-centred camp programmes at their school grounds and further afield.

Considerations for school-based activities and camps

Planning should be informed by the needs of the ākonga

Include ākonga and whānau/caregiver consultation when making any adaptations to the planned activities.

Ensure student information is gathered and shared appropriately

Share [ākonga support plans](#) with the supervision team, so everyone is well informed. (These can also be useful to share with external providers.) Any student information should be shared and managed according to your school's privacy policy, which includes ensuring any volunteers or parents involved understand the requirements around confidentiality.

Adaptations can often be simple – be creative

Keep in mind the purpose and desired outcomes of the activity, and aim to create an equitable experience. See [page 20](#), 'Tailoring your activities'.

The supervision structure is critical

Check enough competent supervisors are available to support ākonga and that they are confident and equipped with the required skills. If training and/or professional learning and development are needed, factor this into your planning.

Plan for unexpected situations

Check all staff involved are confident in how to respond in an emergency or an unlikely or worst-case scenario. For example, a student who is experiencing sensory overload may need to leave the activity and move to a quiet spot away from the main group.

Support whānau to understand the activity

Providing [social stories](#), photos or short videos of the activities and/or location can help students and their whānau better understand the activity. These can also help students feel more confident about their participation. See [page 17](#), 'Clear communication'.

Safety systems and processes

The management of outdoor activities should be consistent with the Ministry of Education EOTC guidelines and your school's own EOTC management systems. Education Outdoors New Zealand has developed an [EOTC safety management plan template and toolkit](#), plus completed examples to support schools' planning processes.

Risk assessment and supervision form

Identify areas needing specific strategies. For example, if a student running away is a risk, consider setting clear boundaries or choosing a more enclosed, low-risk location (eg, away from busy roads). Supervision plans should account for the environment, activity, participants and equipment, and be tailored to the needs of disabled people.

Site/venue checklist

Check the location is fit for purpose for the group and include time for staff to complete any site visits early in the process, to allow for changes if needed.

Emergency response guide

Include considerations such as student accessibility requirements and main contact details, in case you need advice during the event.

Event checklist

Keep a checklist, to help make sure nothing is missed in the planning process.

Resources

Case studies

Case studies show what's possible and how to achieve it. They can support advocacy by highlighting the benefits of outdoor inclusion through the lived experiences of disabled people. Below are examples of inclusive outdoor activity and education programmes in Aotearoa.

Written case studies

[Arohanui Special School](#)

Showcasing an inclusive EOTC programme.

[Adapting to Adventure](#)

Hear from two young people about their experiences of joining Scouts as wheelchair users.

[Neuro-divergent students excel in Duke of Edinburgh Award programme](#)

Led by Leonie King, Diversity & Inclusion Partner at Outward Bound and volunteer Duke of Edinburgh Leader.

[Creating Inclusive Outdoor Experiences](#)

The learning journey of Whenua Iti Outdoors as they become a more inclusive provider.

[Surf's up for rangatahi in Taranaki](#)

A collaborative project between The Halberg Foundation, Oakura Boardriders and ParaFed Taranaki.

Videos

[Recreate NZ Year in Review](#)

Showcasing the types of activities supported by Recreate NZ, a youth disability provider.

[Adaptive Outward Bound](#)

Outward Bound's adaptive programme for adults with a physical impairment.

[Active Aotearoa Rock Climbing](#)

A project delivered by Aktive and Recreate NZ, funded by Sport NZ's Tū Manawa Active Aotearoa fund.

Funding

Inclusive outdoor programmes don't always cost more, and sometimes simple changes can make a big difference. If you need extra staff or specialised equipment, however, your organisation may be eligible for the following funds.

[Halberg activity fund grants](#)

Supports young people with physical impairments aged 5 to 21 years to access physical activity opportunities, including camps.

[Tū Manawa Active Aotearoa](#)

Funding from Sport NZ, distributed by regional sports trusts (RSTs) to support recreation activities for tamariki and rangatahi. The fund has a priority focus on supporting participation opportunities for disabled tamariki and rangatahi. Connect with [your local RST](#) for support on how to apply.

Training opportunities

Upskilling will boost your confidence and ability to deliver high-quality experiences for disabled participants.

Halberg inclusion training

The Halberg Foundation offers in-person training to help schools and recreation organisations create inclusive environments.

Blind Sport New Zealand awareness training

A one-hour online workshop.

CCS Disability Action learning modules

Offers online training options including a free taster module.

Sport tutor inclusion training

A free online module for sport and recreation organisations to learn about inclusion as a response to discrimination.

Adventure Works Inclusion Practices for Outdoor Leaders

Micro-credential

A part-time qualification over eight weeks, with online learning and a face-to-face workshop.

Education presentations by Makingtrax Foundation

Customised online and in-person presentations to promote inclusion in adventure tourism and travel.

Revisioning school camps training

Delivered by Education Outdoors New Zealand to support schools with providing student-centred camp experiences.

Deaf awareness workshop

A one-hour online workshop.

Special Olympics coaching athletes with autism

A free online training module.

Disability organisations

Specialist organisations can provide valuable support, as well as connections to local networks for sharing and promoting your activity.

Autism New Zealand

Provides services, support, education and information for autistic people, their whānau, caregivers and professionals who engage with them.

Blind and Low Vision Education Network NZ

A national network of educational services for children and young people who are blind, deafblind or have low vision.

Blind Citizens NZ

The national advocacy organisation for blind people in Aotearoa New Zealand.

CCS Disability Action

The largest disability support and advocacy organisation in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Carers NZ

Offering information and support for carers.

Deaf Aotearoa

The national organisation representing the voice of Deaf people in Aotearoa New Zealand, offering resources, training and interpreting services.

Disability Connect

A disability information and advisory service based in Auckland.

Disabled Persons Assembly NZ

A not-for-profit, pan-impairment disabled people's organisation run by and for disabled people.

The Halberg Foundation

Supporting sport and recreation opportunities for tamariki and rangatahi with physical disabilities.

I.Lead

A disabled youth movement led by youth for youth. They aim to amplify the voices of disabled young people.

Muscular Dystrophy Association of NZ Inc

A support group for whānau affected by neuromuscular conditions, offering resources, support, networking and advocacy.

People First NZ. Ngā Tangata Tuitahi

An organisation run by and for people with a learning disability.

Inclusive outdoor organisations

The list below is not exhaustive, but these organisations all have experience in offering specific adapted programmes or inclusive outdoor opportunities.

Adventure Works

Offering outdoor leadership opportunities and training programmes.

Adaptive Surfing New Zealand

Information on adaptive equipment, have-a-go days, events and competitive pathways.

Auckland Climbing Youth Development Club

Inclusive climbing centre that runs youth-led programmes for disabled young people.

Blind Sport New Zealand

The national organisation for blind, deafblind and low vision sport and physical recreation.

First Step Outdoors

Outdoor activity provider based in Waikato with experience in inclusive practice.

New Zealand Riding for the Disabled

A member-associated organisation of over 40 riding groups in local communities throughout Aotearoa New Zealand.

Outward Bound

Short courses available for people aged 13-plus years with impairments.

Paddle Able

Developing an inclusive paddle community by working with clubs and providers, offering education, resources, systems and equipment.

The ParaFed Network

A group of regional organisations that provide sport and recreation opportunities for disabled people. They loan equipment and deliver sport and recreation within their local regions.

Recreate NZ

Runs recreation programmes for young people with intellectual disabilities across Aotearoa New Zealand.

Sailability and Blind Sailing

Non-profit organisations around Aotearoa New Zealand that offer specialist sailing groups.

Scouts Aotearoa

Welcomes all young people aged 5 to 26 years and is committed to inclusion through its Diversity and Inclusion Strategy, Youth Advisory Group, and inclusive resources.

Whenua Iti Outdoors

Outdoor activity provider based in Tasman with experience in inclusive practice.

Further reading and guidance

Guide to Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

Identify potential barriers to learning and wellbeing, and understand how to plan by using UDL.

How to break down barriers with UDL

Anticipate and address barriers to learning.

Guide to dyslexia and learning

Present information in different ways, using a multi-sensory approach.

Inclusive design for outdoor recreation

Guidance, checklists and self-audit tools from Active Disability Ireland.

The Inclusion Club

Podcasts, webinars and resources to share good, inclusive practice in sport and recreation for disabled participants.

Inclusivity Hub

Various resources for organisations and individuals wanting to start or progress on their DEI learning journey.

Acknowledgements

This guidance has been developed with valuable input from the following contributors.

Chloe Bishop

Sport New Zealand Ihi Aotearoa

Elle Mackwood

Patricia Avenue Special School

Fiona McDonald

Education Outdoors New Zealand

Jemma Drake

Blind Sport New Zealand

Jenna King

Aktive

Jeza Williams

Makingtrax Foundation

Karla Roberts

Learn Active

Katie Owen

Recreation Aotearoa

Kate Parr

First Step Outdoors

Kieran McKay

Recreation Aotearoa

Kuruho Wereta

Recreation Aotearoa

Lawrence Wilkinson

The Halberg Foundation

Leonie King

Outward Bound

Lynn Kilpatrick

Sport Canterbury

Mark Mandeno

AdventureWorks

Natalie McNulty

Scouts Aotearoa

Sonya Sutherland

New Zealand Outdoor
Instructors Association

Tracey-Lee Dalton

CLM Community Sport



Image source: Parafed Waikato, Water Sports Day

