



## WELLINGTON AFTER-CARE ASSOCIATION :: ALL THE FUN OF THE CIRCUS

The Wellington After-Care team is committed to improving the lives of people with disabilities. They focus on helping those they serve to actively participate in their communities, learn new skills and build meaningful relationships with others.

Wellington After-Care offers services to 300 intellectually, physically and psychiatrically disabled adults in and around Wellington. Services include learning programmes, activities and support to encourage independence and an enhanced quality of life in the areas of home, work and leisure.

In 2012, Wellington After-Care applied to the Working Together More Fund (WTMF) to fund a new collaborative initiative - *'All the Fun of the Circus'*. Wellington After-Care General Manager Kervin Farr said "We contacted the Wellington Circus Trust to see if they were interested in providing an experience for people with disabilities. We were hoping to provide a new experience for some of our clients to increase confidence and self-esteem. We also want to demonstrate to the public that people with intellectual disabilities can achieve and accomplish goals when provided adequate support."

By partnering with the Wellington Circus Trust they wanted clients to gain a greater awareness of their bodies and capabilities by using a variety of apparatus. By tackling new skills, participants would experience increased self-confidence and as the activities are available to the wider-community, they would have access to them beyond the programme.

The WTMF approved a grant of \$4,105 because it seemed clear the initiative was built on a strong foundation of collaboration. This was evident when the first phase of the project was rolled out and the team from Wellington After-Care provided training for the Circus Trust facilitators. Facilitators developed an understanding of disabilities and the confidence needed to offer circus skills training to people with varying abilities. They would retain these skills after the exercise was complete. After the initial training, six Wellington After-Care clients attended 15 weekly circus skills classes run by the Trust facilitators.

WTMF Operations Manager Bede Martin said "The way in which Wellington After-Care and the Wellington Circus Trust partnered on a new initiative demonstrates the wider benefits of successful collaboration. Together they planned and executed a new project that was over and above their everyday 'business as usual' duties - and best of all, the benefits to the participants were of such value."

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Former Wellington After-Care Funding Manager Susan Clare said “The facilities at the Circus Trust and their staff were brilliant and the sessions were pitched perfectly to suit the needs of our clients. Our clients got to know a range of people from the wider community as five facilitators took part from the Circus Trust. These facilitators provided a safe and structured environment for clients with disabilities to succeed.”

Mr Farr said “there was an eagerness from participants to return each week. With a thorough evaluation including observing and surveying participants, and collating feedback from those who made it happen, we established the project met its objectives”.

- ⇒ **Participants experienced increased confidence** > they were encouraged to overcome barriers and undertake new activities such as learning to trapeze despite a previous fear of heights
- ⇒ **They better understood their bodies and capabilities** > one participant experiences limited mobility in one arm yet managed to juggle with both hands
- ⇒ **Enhanced teamwork amongst participants** > participants were required to work collaboratively throughout the exercises
- ⇒ **Sense of accomplishment and pride** > the project culminated in an informal performance for participants to showcase new skills further build confidence
- ⇒ **Mutual benefit for both organisations** > Wellington After-Care were able to provide a new service to their clients that would encourage participation in the wider community. The Circus Trust team were able to gain knowledge and skills to work with people with disabilities – this met a longer term objective to offer circus classes to people with special needs.

Due to the successful trial, Wellington After-Care hopes to offer the programme to new participants while further developing the skills of existing participants. They also wish to encourage existing participants who achieve high levels of increased confidence, to attend the circus skills classes by themselves.

When asked about advice for other groups looking to collaborate, Mr Farr said “it is important to identify another organisation with similar values and interests.” Mr Farr described the experience of collaborating with the Wellington Circus Trust as “very rewarding for all concerned.” He also said the WTMF grant “provided the resources that both organisations needed to achieve the goal of providing a new experience for people with disabilities.”

### Further information Wellington After-Care Association:

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