



Adult support

People with Down syndrome want the same things in life as everyone else – they want somewhere to live, meaningful employment, the opportunity to enjoy the company of friends and family, intimacy, and genuine inclusion in the local community. But the path to the achievement of these goals is so much more complex than for those in the community without an intellectual disability.

Many people with Down syndrome are capable of employment in the open market and inclusion in the local community. The greatest challenge facing them is not their intellectual disability but confronting negative attitudes, overcoming outdated stereotypes and challenging the limitations placed upon them by others. What they lack is not ability, but opportunity.

Our recent experience in the pilot Mentoring Connections initiative demonstrated that there is considerable variance in understanding of work and work readiness among adults with Down syndrome. They also revealed a very strong desire for opportunities to develop social relationships with peers, both with a disability and without.

The ongoing Down Syndrome Victoria adult support strategy will focus on providing social engagement opportunities via a peer support network. This network will also be used as a vehicle to engage adults with Down syndrome in learning skills for the workplace and improved independence.

The peer support network will provide opportunities for adults with Down syndrome to:

- Get together and have fun
- Share experiences and support one another

- Develop independence and life skills
- Participate in raising community awareness about Down syndrome
- Build confidence and social skills
- Make friends
- Have their voices heard
- Learn about work

A committee will be made up of adults with Down syndrome and a planning meeting will be held every three months for members to put forward their ideas for future group activities throughout Victoria. These can also be emailed, phoned or posted in. Opportunities for interested members to be matched with a mentor will also form part of this network.

It is anticipated, with the upgrade of the Down Syndrome Victoria website, that it will also be possible to form a secure online community of peer support group members in the future.



Education support

Down Syndrome Victoria is delighted to announce that our Educational Support Service (ESS) will continue in 2009. The last year has seen ESS settle into its new home at Down Syndrome Victoria and consolidate itself as a critical service supporting students with Down syndrome and the schools they attend.

In 2009 the annual subscription fee will continue to be heavily subsidised by Down Syndrome Victoria and remains at \$550.00 per annum per child regardless of the location of the school.

ESS will support a maximum of 50 subscribers by providing the nominated school and family contacts with:

- 9 hours of visits throughout the year (3 x 3 hours or equivalent)
- Unrestricted email contact
- Unrestricted phone contact
- Access to resources and/or information as required

How these visits and hours are used will vary according to the needs of students and may include:

- Attendance as an advocate/support at Student Support Groups
- Assistance with program planning
- Goal setting
- Access to relevant resources
- Discussion with class or subject teachers regarding subject or student specific matters
- Talks at staff meetings
- Demonstration teaching with students
- Suggestions regarding teaching strategies and learning styles
- Links to other support services
- Transition programs

- Behaviour management strategies
- Sexuality issues

Those who do not opt for annual subscription, or are on the waiting list, will still have access to the Education Support Service at a cost of \$100.00 per hour. These consultancy rates may include visits, phone or email support for schools.

Down Syndrome Victoria also offers an annual professional development day in term one for educators as part of the Education Support Service. This is a great opportunity for Principals, class teachers and aides to find out about learners with Down syndrome alongside a group of their peers.

This year Down Syndrome Victoria is delighted to release a resource book *Learners with Down Syndrome*. This invaluable resource is aimed at teachers, principals and aides but will provide important information for everyone involved in the education of students with Down syndrome, including parents. Drawing together international research and best practice, it outlines the issues learners with Down syndrome most commonly face and provides practical strategies to ensure their educational needs are met and that they are able to reach their full potential.



Family support

Down Syndrome Victoria has been a specialist in peer support for the past 30 years. We believe the best people to provide support to a family with a child with Down syndrome are others who are sharing that same journey. International research into families with a child with a disability demonstrates that people value the support provided by peers more than they value support provided by professionals.

Our experience here at Down Syndrome Victoria bears this out. Our model of peer support has been extended beyond families to include adults with Down syndrome who also benefit from meeting regularly with others who share similar life experiences. With a focus on empowerment and peer support, we aim to build resilience in families, to help ensure their family

member with Down syndrome reaches his or her full potential, as well as resilience in individuals with Down syndrome.

2008 family support statistics

Families with a new baby who contacted DSV	52
Families with a new baby who didn't make contact with DSV	7
Culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) families	13
Pre-natal contacts	9

Family Support throughout Victoria

