

Disability Action Plan

2020 – 2022

Forward from the CEO

I am pleased to present to you the *Geelong Arts Centre Disability Action Plan 2020-2022*.

We reflect on the history of the Centre which first opened its doors to the Geelong community in 1981. Designed in the late 1970's the building lacked the universal physical access that we would expect today. Retrofitted initiatives over the years included small-scale lifts and stair climbers to stage level for performers, platform lifts for patrons and stair climbers to reach offices.

For the tenure of this plan we are in a transformational period as we embark on the Little Malop Street Redevelopment due to start in 2020 and completed in 2023. This major capital project means that our 39-year old building will be demolished and we will lose access to our traditional theatres and administration areas.

For the duration of this plan our programs and events will be run from our Ryrie Street studios, Deakin University's Costa Hall and external facilities. Our administration staff will relocate to leased office premises.

While acknowledging the potential challenges of redevelopment the Centre will use this next three-year period to focus on strategic objectives that will position the organisation as central to arts and cultural life in the region.

We celebrate our achievements to date and will continue to identify and reduce the barriers that prevent people with disability engaging with us. There is much we can achieve in this three-year period and we will strive to empower people with disability to be both creators and consumers of arts and culture.

Consistent with our core values, this plan builds on our achievements to date and adopts a strategic approach to addressing access across the whole organisation for the next three years. I am excited about the opportunities it offers and commend this plan to you.

Joel McGuinness
Chief Executive Officer

Introduction

This plan has been developed in response to our ongoing commitment to the provision of equitable, dignified access to all our services, facilities, programs, communications and employment systems. This plan has been developed in line with *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (Cth) (DDA) and the *Victorian Disability Act 2006* (Vic) (VDA).

The DDA applies across Australia. Its purposes include the elimination, as far as possible, of discrimination against people with disabilities in a range of areas, including access to employment, access to education, access to premises and access to the provision of goods and services. The DDA also applies to family, support workers and other associates of any person with a disability. The VDA provides the framework for a whole-of-government approach to enable people with a disability to participate in community life.

Section 38 of the VDA specifies that a Disability Action Plan is prepared for the purposes of:

- a) reducing barriers to persons with a disability accessing goods, services and facilities;
- b) reducing barriers to persons with a disability obtaining and maintaining employment;
- c) promoting inclusion and participation in the community of persons with a disability;
- d) achieving tangible changes in attitudes and practice which discriminate against persons with a disability.

The term disability encompasses impairments of a physical, intellectual or sensory nature. The term 'disability' as defined in the DDA also includes people with a medical condition, short-term or temporary disability, psychiatric disability (mental illness) or learning disability.

The relationship between the terms 'disability', 'barriers' and 'access' is further explained through the principles originating in the Social Model of Disability. This model proposes that people are not disabled by a medical condition but by physical, attitudinal, communication and social barriers. This plan focusses on breaking down barriers so that the levels of access are increased in relation to:

1. Access to spaces and services
2. Inclusion and participation
3. Access to employment
4. Leadership and behaviours

Each of these areas articulates an overarching goal, a series of actions along with identified responsibilities, measures and timeframes.

This plan is registered with the Human Rights Commission and available on the Geelong Arts Centre website www.geelongartscentre.org.au.

Achievements

Major capital projects

This plan celebrates significant milestones in the improvement of physical access enabled by the Victorian Government's \$165m investment in two major building construction projects.

The first of those projects, the **Ryrie Street Redevelopment**, was completed in November 2019 and delivered comprehensively on physical access issues raised in our previous Disability Action Plan. This newly constructed 5-level build has been deemed compliant with the DDA and National Construction Code. The main entrance is fully accessible with a slip resistant ramp including colour and textural treatment and an automated door. There is an accessible drop off point and disabled parking close to the entry. All levels include lift access and wheelchair/ambulant bathroom facilities. Doors have accessible push button releases on the inside for exiting. The fire stairwell has been designed as a 'fire refuge'.

The opening up of the back of the Playhouse Theatre balcony has significantly improved the ease of wheelchair accessible seating for our patrons. For creatives working in our new Creative Engine space we have adjustable height workstations.

Accessible wayfinding signage highlights the pathway from the entrance to lifts and amenities. Bathroom facilities are identified with international symbols of access, raised tactile and braille signage. Hearing augmentation is provided throughout the building and the international deafness symbol is used to indicate where the assisted listening system is operational.

The second project, the **Little Malop Street Redevelopment**, will demolish the old building and a new build will completely transform the Centre. Work will start in 2020 and be completed by the end of 2023. In addition to the access amenity provided by the Ryrie Street Redevelopment this project is committed to safe and user-friendly technical systems in the new theatres.

Back to Back Theatre

Our stages first welcomed Back to Back Theatre for its 1988 production of *Big Bag*. In more recent years our partnership with this nationally and internationally renowned theatre company has grown and matured.

Major productions such as *Food Court*, *Small Metal Objects*, *Ganesh versus the Third Reich* and most recently in 2019, *The Shadow Whose Prey the Hunter Becomes*, have formed part of the Centre's mainstream Theatre Season programming.

Creative Learning

Initially contracted for performances in 2020 Sensorium Theatre's immersive work 'Woosh' will now join us in 2021. This production has been created for young people with access needs by creating custom made sensory theatre experiences.

The Creative Learning program has a strong relationship with Barwon Valley School and for the last five years this special development school has taken part in the *Geelong Schools Music and Movement Festival* alongside students from more than 40 schools throughout the Geelong region. Students participate both on stage and as audience members and in preparation take part in a 'walk-through' of the venue prior to the festival.

For the last three years Back to Back Theatre ensemble members have run workshops for children without disability as part of the annual *Poppykettle* Festival.

Creative Learning staff have recently joined an external network group hosted by NDIS and Barwon Child Youth & Family focussing on opportunities for children and youth with disabilities and their families.

Livestreaming

Livestreaming of performances became a feature of our Centre's programming during 2020 initially in response to the necessary closure of our whole building during the pandemic and then continued closure of a significant section of the Centre for the Little Malop Street Redevelopment. While able-bodied patrons have been impacted by not being able to see live performance on stage, many people with disability now have equal access.

Training and development

Key box office staff have taken part in training provided by the industry's Box Office Managers Network (BOMNet) to assess the needs of patrons with a disability at the time of making their booking, including wheelchair access, best placement in the theatre, arranging assisted hearing devices. Box office staff are chosen for their ability to empathise with all patrons and be adaptable to their needs.

Access information for patrons

All printed ticket wallets include accessibility information. The Centre's website includes accessibility information for our venues.

Administration office facilities

The majority of desks in administration areas are now adjustable height workstations.

Geelong Arts Centre Disability Action Plan Goals

Geelong Arts Centre has developed specific goals and related actions to address the four principles originating in the Social Model of Disability. Many of the actions from the have now been implemented and as part of our commitment to continued improvement the Disability Action Plan consolidates and builds on progress made. The detailed list of actions is currently being updated to reflect changes for FY 2020-21; progress and revised actions against the goals will be provided following the end of the financial year.

1. Access to spaces and services

Goal: Identify and reduce barriers to enable universal access to physical and online spaces and services

2. Inclusion and participation

Goal: Invite and welcome people with disability to our Centre to take part in our events and programs

3. Access to employment

Goal: Reduce the barriers for people with disability obtaining and maintaining employment

4. Leadership and behaviours

Goal: Maintain the Centre's impetus for inclusive practice through consultation, proactive leadership and developing positive attitudes