

Disability Action Plan

2020 – 2022

Forward

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. The previous Little Malop Street building, designed in the late 1970's, 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 for completion 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 building, 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 impede access for people of all abilities. 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 and Creative Director
Geelong Arts Centre

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 \$177m 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 the new build will completely transform the Centre. Work commenced in 2020 and is due for completion in 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 and has engaged equity consultants to confirm DDA compliance and ensure the facilities are fully accessible, inclusive and promote participation for people with disabilities.

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 which unfortunately was disrupted in 2020 and 2021 due to the pandemic.

Creative Learning

Initially contracted for performances in 2020 Sensorium Theatre's immersive work 'Woosh' were then engaged to join us in 2021 but these performances were also disrupted by the pandemic. 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 building during the pandemic giving all audiences access to performances throughout the pandemic and including those living with a disability who may not have been able to attend in our performance spaces. There is further opportunity to continue our live streaming program through the duration of the Little Malop Street Redevelopment

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

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.

1. Access to spaces and services

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

Action	Measure	Responsibility	Timeframe	Update
1.1 The Centre will ensure that the principles of access, inclusion and participation are embedded and championed for the Little Malop Street Redevelopment	Little Malop Street Redevelopment design, planning and construction reflects access, inclusion and participation commitment	Manager Redevelopment	2020-2022	Implemented/ Ongoing
1.2 Engage with disability networks and organisations across a range of access needs to assess and seek feedback on the use of the Ryrie Street building.	Action plan developed for meeting accessibility requirements.	Director Production Operations	Jun 2021	Implemented/ Ongoing
1.3 Assess the newly leased administration offices in Malop Street for accessibility for both visitors and staff	Action plan developed for meeting accessibility requirements.	Director Production Operations	Dec 2020	Completed
1.4 Ensure that external venues used during the period of closure of theatres for the Little Malop Street Redevelopment are accessible.	Source or create an accessibility checklist that must be completed by programming staff producing events and programs at external venues	Manager Presenter Services	Dec 2020	Completed
1.5 1.5.1 Ensure that accessibility is clearly communicated across the Centre's owned and earned communications channels. 1.5.2 Review and update the accessibility page on our website to promote disability access services using disability access symbols.	Website and social media have up to date accessibility information, noting the closure/reopening/opening of venues during the Little Malop Street Redevelopment.	Director Development & Marketing	2020-2022	1.5.1 Implemented/ Ongoing 1.5.2 Completed
1.6 Engage an accessibility consultant to assess our website and its content	Action plan developed for best practice in website accessibility	Director Development & Marketing	Jun 2021 Jun 2022	Implemented/ Ongoing
1.7 Develop communication boards for box office and front of house staff	Communication boards distributed to staff an available on the Centre's website	Manager Visitor Experience	Jun 2021	Implementing

2. Inclusion and participation

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

Action	Measure	Responsibility	Timeframe	Update	
2.1	Build our relationship with the Geelong Inclusion Network (GIN) to identify opportunities for young people with disability and their families. (This action has been adjusted GIN to as NDIS/BCYF network has folded.)	Regular attendance at network meetings	Senior Producer - Youth Families & Creative Learning	Jun 2022	Implemented/Ongoing
2.2	Investigate partnership opportunities through the Deakin University and NDIA AllPlay Dance initiative, including the Centre's programming and Dance Schools using our studios.	Implementation plan for one initiative	Senior Producer - Youth, Families & Creative Learning	Jun 2021	Implemented/Ongoing
2.3	Investigate and trial the use of 'Relaxed' or 'Adaptive' performances recognising the potential benefits for people with autism, sensory sensitivities, learning disabilities, dementia, those living with anxiety or who have experienced trauma	Present a relaxed/adaptive performance as part of the Creative Learning program	Senior Producer - Youth, Families & Creative Learning	Jun 2022	Implemented/Ongoing
2.4	Seek advice and assistance from Vision Australia to run Audio Described performances.	Increase in the number of performances that are audio described annually	Executive Producer	Jun 2022	Ongoing
2.5	Investigate Auslan services available in the Geelong region with a view to selected performances being Auslan interpreted	Increase in the number of performances that are Auslan interpreted annually	Executive Producer	Jun 2022	Ongoing
2.6	Investigate the use of captioning for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> live performances for those with hearing loss too severe to benefit from the use of hearing loops livestreamed performances 	Report on the use of captioning including equipment requirements	Executive Producer	Dec 2021	Ongoing
2.7	Test hearing loops and systems regularly with hearing impaired volunteers	Testing plan in place and implemented	Director Production Operations	Jun 2022	Implemented/Ongoing
2.8	Promote the Centre's disability access facilities to commercial and community hirers	Disability Access Guide created for commercial and community hirers Guide distributed	Manager Presenter Services	Jun 2021	Implemented/Ongoing
2.9	Maintain our long-term relationship with Back to Back Theatre	Increase in the number of programs involving Back to Back annually	Executive Producer	Jun 2022	Implemented/Ongoing

3. Access to employment

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

Action	Measure	Responsibility	Timeframe	Update	
3.1	Include the Centre's commitment to disability access in induction programs for all staff	Induction program updated to include disability access information	Director Corporate Services	Dec 2021	Implementing
3.2	Engage with disability recruitment specialists to assess barriers for people with disabilities in applying for roles at the Centre and recommend strategies for removing barriers	Update attraction and recruitment process in response to recommendations	Director Corporate Services	Dec 2021	Implementing
3.3	Document staff access requirements and build in to onboarding phase	Staff have the equipment and support they need to fulfil their role.	Director Corporate Services	Dec 2021	Implemented/ Ongoing
3.4	Support businesses who employ people with disabilities	Level of engagement in accordance with Social Procurement reporting	Director Corporate Services	Jun 2021 Jun 2022	Implementing

4. Leadership and behaviours

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

Action	Measure	Responsibility	Timeframe	Update	
4.1	Include standing agenda item in fortnightly Executive Leadership Team meeting report on progress	CEO and ELT	Jun 2020	Implemented/ Ongoing	
4.2	Engage the disability sector to assist in connecting with people with disability and to advise on access issues	Engagement sessions with DDA consultant and disability sector members to review redevelopment plans	Chief Executive Officer	Jun 2022	Implemented/ Ongoing
4.3	Investigate funding opportunities and strategic partnerships to develop a program that creates opportunities for people with disability in the performing arts	Initiatives implemented to provide opportunities for people with disability in the performing arts	Executive Producer	Dec 2022	Partially completed/ Ongoing
4.4	Embed the principles of this Disability Acton Plan in the organisation through the Strategic Plan, Corporate Plan and reporting progress against this plan to the Trust, in the Annual Report and staff communications	Strategic Plan outlines commitment, Corporate Plan includes actions, Trust agenda includes progress reporting and Annual Report describes achievements	Chief Executive Officer	Jun 2021	Implemented/ Ongoing
4.5	Include access costs in the annual budget	Specific line items for access included in budget	Chief Executive Officer and Executive Leadership Team	Jun 2021 Jun 2022	Completed annually
4.6	Build awareness and competence of Centre staff to address the needs of people with disability as part of their regular practice	The annual staff training plan includes awareness and competence training	Director Corporate Services	Jun 2021 Jun 2022	Completed annually