

Submission
No 25

**INQUIRY INTO SERVICES PROVIDED OR FUNDED BY
THE DEPARTMENT OF AGEING, DISABILITY AND
HOME CARE**

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Response to Standing Committee on Social Issues Inquiry.

Services provided or funded by the Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care.

Accessible Arts would like to highlight numerous points and issues with regard to the Terms of Reference of this Inquiry, relating to item 1(c) ...'flexibility in client funding arrangements, and client focused service delivery'. These issues may also relate to other areas of the Terms of Reference such as (a) level of funding and unmet need, (b) variations in service delivery and program quality and (g) other matters.

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About Accessible Arts

Accessible Arts promotes full inclusion, access and cultural opportunities in the arts for people with disabilities in NSW. Accessible Arts provides many services including arts development, access consultation, art programs coordination and strategic planning and development. Staff provide consultancy services to organisations about how to make their venue and



services more suitable for people with disabilities, and to assist them with issues relating to accessibility.

Comments and Issues

1. Inflexibility in service provision

At Accessible Arts, staff often hear service providers state they are unable to provide flexibility for individuals who wish to attend a community-based activity or program; often these activities are of interest to individuals with an interest in art and culture, but who cannot attend or participate, as it outside what has been 'allocated' or arranged for a group.

This inflexibility is partly due to the reluctance of service providers to provide a range of varied activities as do to so is inconvenient, more organisation and uses more resources to provide access to a broad range of experiences for the person with a disability. Whilst the current review regarding the Lifestyle Planning Policy and Practice Guidelines (ADHC, 2009) may consider some variation in activity base, practical aspects can make this difficult for service providers to achieve.

One of these practical aspects is transport. Service providers have told Accessible Arts that they will not take one of their 'clients' to an art activity,



program or event because it is just one person that they have to transport. As people with disability develop their artistic skills it is preferable that they begin to further develop their abilities in an arts specific environment and preferably in an integrated environment.

2. Self-determination: person-centred approach

People with a disability (of all abilities) would prefer to exercise their right of choice and attend an event that they are personally interested in, rather than be involuntarily involved in an activity that is not their preference. When conducting consultations across NSW regarding arts access for people with a disability, one of the participants said, 'Why are people with a disability always controlled? Why can't we make our own decisions?' There are many ways to give people a choice, regardless of their level of disability and support needs, and to provide access to art and culture experiences.

The Life Choices and Active Ageing Program Guidelines make some headway into self-determined program activities, however these 'choices' are still only what is narrowed by the service provider as being available, easier to provide and feasible due to available resources.

Broader thinking about art and cultural activities as defined in government guidelines and standards is required to move away from the rigidity that these



areas are only relevant for 'recreation' or 'therapeutic' purposes (such as that in the Life Choices and Active Ageing Program Guidelines – see below). Art related activities are applicable across all of the areas in these guidelines, as a means for learning, education and skill development, social networking, gentle exercise and community access:

Physical activity, sport and active life

Gentle exercise, bush walking, gym, tai chi, bowling, aerobics, tennis, swimming, golf, and **dancing**.

Recreation

Woodwork, music, art, craft, sewing, needlecraft, games, computer activities, writing, gardening, **attending concerts**, and **visiting galleries and museums**.

Social networks

Community meetings, neighbourhood clubs, morning teas, and community outings and activities.

Therapeutic

Art or music therapy, relaxation, yoga, massage, and access to sensory rooms.

Learning, education and skills

Vocational assistance, personal development, vehicle care, travel training, stranger- danger awareness, and volunteering.



Independent living

Cooking, personal grooming, banking, retail or budget programs, and tuck shop.

Community access and community presence

Shopping and outings (movies, sporting clubs, picnics, cafes, using public transport, and road safety skills).

There needs to be far greater awareness and acknowledgement of the arts in all relevant policies and guidelines, especially relating to community access and participation. For example, in the section above, *Community access and community presence*, only one aspect of the arts is mentioned when there are so many other opportunities – literature e.g. attending public libraries; performance e.g. visiting or participating in local theatre; or activities such as those listed under *Recreation*. Community involvement must always focus on the inclusion of the arts as a viable and valuable life long path for people with a disability.

3. Disability as a general inclusion

Including references to disability should be compulsory for all staff who develop any NSW government/ Department of Human Services/ ADHC policies including guidelines, programs and initiatives; in all departments, across all program areas. This will contribute toward an inclusive whole-of-



government approach and would be more successful if incorporated into publication guidelines via any Communications/Public Relations team.

In addition, the inclusion of disability related issues should be actively mentioned in all funding guidelines and form a key reporting requirement. 'Actively mentioned' means that this reference would be accompanied by an action pertaining to this target group, e.g. if program guidelines or a project plan, people with a disability would be specifically mentioned as key stakeholders with whom a service provider/department must consult, and in any document, people with a disability would be mentioned with regard to how the provision of access (to the document, service, buildings, project, etc.) will be guaranteed.

This would be an excellent way to ensure a more inclusive approach to service delivery by service providers and government, and would help toward ensuring that the needs of people with a disability are not overlooked.

4. People with a disability exist outside entry and exit points

People who do not have a 'significant' disability, or who have a temporary disability are not, by the inference of the opposite meaning of the word, insignificant: they also face discrimination, prejudice, lack of access to basic



and general services, and face many other difficulties which without support and advocacy cannot be overcome.

Whilst ADHC's clients, according to the website, are 'people with a disability' (assumed to mean ALL people with a disability), few of the services provided are directed toward people who do not have a severe or significant disability, and those that do place an emphasis upon people with a higher level of disability.

Even though promoting an inclusive and community approach, ADHC's own core business seems exclusive, and the perception of the service sector exists only to that as funded by the department. An example of this can be seen in the definition of *community support* in the Stronger Together plan; the 'typical' services listed indicate a concentration upon a target group with high needs, and forgets that all people with a disability need help to live in their community - including those that (by the assumption of others) are perceived as being more self-sufficient. In general, the Stronger Together document, including Section 3, focuses upon only that portion of people with a disability who 'fit' into the system. What about the others who don't?

It is acknowledged that the provision of services to any target group can be costly, and these costs are more for some target groups than others e.g. rural



and regional services, those with high and ongoing needs, and services that require high amounts of assets and resources to provide. In the area of disability however, funding and support attention is focused upon the intensive and high level of care and support end of the service spectrum. This is necessary to maintain, however more focus and resources should be given to primary 'intervention', e.g. training and education, social research, and programs that on one hand promote the provision of access and an inclusive attitude, and on the other hand addresses issues prejudice, discrimination and exclusion in society. These types of programs would benefit **all** people with a disability (of all disability 'levels'), and is an excellent way to engage communities.

5. Back to the basics: Definitions of disability

Please change ADHC's definitions of people with a disability! (As stated in the fact sheets in different languages on the website). The English definition of a person/people with a disability is stated as:

' People with difficulties in any of the following areas: learning, thinking through things, hearing, moving around, etc.'



This definition is insufficient in that it does not include many disabilities and also assumes that a disability can be seen by others. In addition, the definition of *physical disability* as provided by ADHC is also inadequate and limited.

A better definition that can still be provided in plain english, would be similar to that as provided by the Australian Human Rights Commission in their Frequently Asked Questions webpage (AHRC – see their website www.humanrights.gov.au). This webpage explains the different types of disability including those hidden e.g. epilepsy, allergies.

Accessible Arts acknowledges the efforts of service providers and government to do what is best for the majority. We hope however, that this is not at the expense of those individuals who, whilst may appear 'able', still need government to advocate on their behalf to improve their daily lives.

6. The importance of consultation

How important it is to consult with people with a disability when planning activities, programs services or events can be demonstrated by the following:

Despite publicising through deaf media and the deaf community, only one person attended the Auslan interpreted event at the Sydney Writers' Festival (SWF). Accessible Arts received feedback that the event itself was of little



interest to the deaf community, generally, as it was a very intensively text based event for a community that has significant literacy issues. The point was made that no one had asked the deaf community what events they might be interested in and the choosing of one event by the SWF organisers out of over 200 was, without consultation, arbitrary, and almost set up to fail.

This is a very clear case of assuming people with a disability or deaf people will take whatever is on offer just because it is on offer. Market research is a key element of providing services for any audience and consultation should be occur as part of all planning processes if provision of services is to be meaningful for those it is provided.

7. Our research findings

During 2007 and 2008, Accessible Arts undertook extensive consultative research that included over 500 participants as part of an Arts and Disability Action Strategy; the final report is entitled *Speak Up*, and it outlines numerous actions and priorities as a result of feedback across metropolitan and rural/regional NSW. This feedback was received from arts and disability service organisation representatives, people with a disability, and carers.

The research uncovered many issues and actions and outlined the following seven areas: Arts; Disability; Access and Audiences; Connecting and



Communicating; Education and Training; Capacity Building and Implementation. Whilst many of the other areas are relevant, the actions as related to the Disability section are summarised in an appendix to this submission. Please include these key findings as part of the formal submission response.

8. The benefits of the arts for people with a disability

Involvement in the Arts offers many benefits and should be incorporated into disability services' programs and activities whenever possible. Benefits include:

- Opportunities for self expression and personal growth leading to enhanced confidence and skill development;
- Participants often develop supportive social networks and fuller social lives and deeper friendships;
- Through sharing and discussing their art, people can develop greater communication skills;
- Art provides the opportunity for involvement in activities that can be done in groups or as an individual;
- Learning about art, craft and culture can lead to a wish to participate e.g. reading about artists may lead to the desire to pick up a paint brush or join a dance group;
- The arts connect people with themselves and each other;



- Art has the capacity to make everyone see things differently – as for most, people with disabilities like to perceive things in various ways;
- The arts can provide a mechanism for problem solving for individuals and groups, and is an environment that encourages learning and to take risks in a positive way;
- The arts is a potential employment avenue; and
- Art nourishes and enriches all our lives.

Yours sincerely

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APPENDIX ONE – Accessible Arts Consultation Findings

Key findings relating to disability are as follows:

- **Disability Arts Coordinators** are required to ensure that quality arts programmes are offered within all disability services;
- **Meaningful and consistent consultation** is imperative to enable the disability sector to meet the creative interests and needs of its clients;
- **The value of the arts** needs to be promoted through information and education to the disability sector;
- **Participants' access needs** require consideration and provision in the planning, marketing, implementation and evaluation of activities;
- **Carers** are often forgotten and need to be engaged in or provided with respite through creative programs.

Disability Arts Coordinators are trained and qualified in the arts and would ensure quality programming and the engagement of a range of tutors with specialised skills in specific artforms. **Disability Arts Coordinators** are required to:

- a) Ensure that quality arts programmes are offered within all disability services. Many disability organisations offer arts or craft programmes that are delivered by those not trained in the arts;



- b) Facilitate a variety of experiences and opportunities for people with disability so that they can gain a taste of the arts including both audience and arts development;
- c) Work with participants to identify what interested them to enable additional skills development in those areas.

Meaningful and consistent consultation is imperative to enable the disability sector to meet the creative interests and needs of its clients. Often a person with disability is not asked what they are interested in or would like to participate in. This is a critical issue. People with disability often have specific creative interests that the disability or residential service may not facilitate their participation in. Formal staff to client ratios lack the flexibility to enable participation of individuals in programmes specific to them. Instead, group experiences are defined often by what the carer or staff member identifies. There needs to be structures set in place to ensure that people with disability direct and gain the opportunity to participate in activities and programmes that they are passionate about.

The value of the arts needs to be promoted through information and education to the disability sector. Family, friends carers and staff of disability may be unaware of the value of the arts and creative processes. Education and information about opportunities need to be made available to the disability sector.



Participants' **access needs** require consideration and provision in the planning, marketing, implementation and evaluation of initiatives. Arts organisations identified that when planning programmes for people with disability, it was valuable to know what access needs each individual experienced. However, they identified that often the access needs of individuals was overlooked by disability services organising visits. Arts organisations such as the Museum of Contemporary Art have found that detailed information about visitor access requirements assists in providing full and inclusive experiences through flexible education and outreach programmes.

Carers are often forgotten and need to be engaged or provided with respite through creative programs. Many carers gain little support through current government and disability service policies. When caring becomes a full-time role on top of work and other commitments, there is little space, financial capacity or resources to explore individual creative interests. Furthermore, carers identified that when jointly participating in a creative program, this provided an opportunity to communicate in a different environment increasing their bond and improving their relationship. Others identified that a family member participating in a creative program provided them with critical respite.

Source: *Speak Up: Arts and Disability Priorities for NSW* (Accessible Arts, 2009, pp. 15-17).