

# Open Arts

## Reflections on the Disability and the Arts Inclusion Initiative in Western Australia

A partnership between the Department of Culture and the Arts  
and the Disability Services Commission.



# open arts



Government of Western Australia  
Department of Culture and the Arts



The Department of Culture and the Arts acknowledges the valuable input of participating Disability and the Arts Inclusion Initiative (DAII) Pilot Project organisations in the development of this publication.

## **Copyright Statement**

### **© Department of Culture and the Arts 2010**

This work is copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purchase of private research, criticism or review as permitted under the Copyright Act, no part may be reproduced by any process without the written permission of the publisher. Requests and enquiries concerning the reproduction and rights should be addressed to the Department of Culture and the Arts, Western Australia. All artworks represented in this publication are subject to current copyright law.

## **Disclaimer**

The information provided in this publication was correct at the time of printing but circumstances may change. Links to organisations and artists outside the Department for Culture and the Arts do not constitute an endorsement of those organisations or the quality of their programs, products and services.

# Contents

**Introduction . . . . . page 5**

## **Accessible arts experiences**

**Inclusive theatre for young people . . . . . page 7**

Barking Gecko Theatre Company in partnership  
with the WA Deaf Society

**Experiencing art through touch . . . . . page 11**

The Art Gallery of Western Australia in partnership  
with Vision Australia and Sculpture by the Sea

**Taking accessibility online . . . . . page 16**

Propel Youth Arts WA in partnership with Swan  
Friendship Club

**Arts for everyone . . . . . page 21**

Country Arts WA in partnership with the National  
Disability Services WA

**Improving the live theatre experience . . . . . page 24**

Perth Theatre Trust in partnership with Subiaco  
Arts Centre, Barking Gecko Theatre Company  
and Senses Foundation

## **Inclusive arts practice**

**Growing community arts . . . . . page 29**

Victoria Park Centre for the Arts in partnership  
with Nulsen

**Moving dancers into the professional sphere . . page 34**

STRUT Dance

**Weaving inclusion into the community . . . . . page 39**

Mundaring Arts Centre in partnership with DADAA  
WA and the Hills Community Support Group

**Integrating dancers of all abilities . . . . . page 44**

Ausdance in partnership with DADAA WA and  
the Mandurah Disabled Support and Recreational  
Respite Inc

## Message from the Director General, Department of Culture and the Arts

The Department of Culture and the Arts is pleased to present **Open Arts**, a collection of stories from the Disability and the Arts Inclusion Initiative (DAII), celebrating inclusive arts partnerships in Western Australia.

The Disability and the Arts Inclusion Initiative is an excellent example of the potential of cross-government and cross-sector partnerships. In particular, it has provided a practical model via which individual arts and cultural organisations can create opportunities and environments that are positive and welcoming of people with disabilities.

Projects such as DAII successfully highlight our commitment to ensuring that unique and transforming culture and arts experiences are made available to all Western Australians.

I would like to thank those organisations and individuals who shared their stories for this publication and encourage you all to continue your excellent work in creating inclusive Western Australian communities.

### **Allanah Lucas**

Director General  
Department of Culture and the Arts



## Message from the Director General, Disability Services Commission

The Disability Services Commission welcomes the wonderful, collaborative partnerships and outcomes that the Disability and the Arts Inclusion Initiative (DAII) has fostered.

**Open Arts** is a collection of stories reflecting on the journey for the artists with disabilities who participated in this opportunity to showcase their talents. Projects of this nature really highlight the value of an inclusive Western Australia by recognising the contribution and participation of all its citizens.

Through the implementation of the DAII model, arts and cultural community organisations have trained their employees to adopt inclusive policies and practices. These in turn enhance their decision-making skills and engagement with artists and audiences with disabilities. This has created the long term benefit of embedding this openness into our culture and everyday practice which is essential for a truly welcoming community.

Thank you to all the individuals and organisations that were involved in this project and for sharing their experiences through this publication.

### **Ron Chalmers**

Director General  
Disability Services Commission



# Introduction

In July 2006 the Department of Culture and the Arts (DCA), in partnership with the Disability Services Commission (DSC) began working on the Disability and the Arts Inclusion Initiative (DAII). The project saw arts and cultural organisations in Western Australia embark on a journey to provide opportunities to people with disabilities and their families and carers, to participate in everyday arts and cultural activities.

In December 2006, 14 arts and cultural organisations signed up to become DAII partners, and completed Stage 1 and 2 of the DAII Model (see diagram below).

Seven of these organisations went on to create an inclusive project with a disability organisation or artists with disabilities.

## Four stages of the DAII Model for WA arts and cultural groups.

**1. Reflect**  
on current programs and undertake self-assessment audits

**2. Connect**  
with disability groups/  
undertake professional development



**4. Celebrate**  
publish case studies and showcase partnerships at events

**3. Create**  
pilot projects with disability partners and artists with disabilities

## Reflect

In March 2007 participating arts organisations reviewed their services and programs to evaluate how accessible they were to people with disabilities.

## Connect

In April 2007 these organisations undertook disability awareness training and a 'get to know you' session with disability organisations.

## Create

Between April 2007 and December 2009 pilot projects were planned and implemented by arts organisations in partnership with disability organisations and DCA. Each project had to highlight 'inclusion', which is essentially the practice of ensuring that people feel they belong, are engaged, and connected to a group or community. The projects developed by each of the organisations were not separate to their core business and were based on committed mutual learning.

## Celebrate

The final stage of the DAII Model is to 'celebrate', which leads us to this publication. **Open Arts** highlights the successful projects carried out by each of the funded arts organisations involved, as well as the work of two other arts organisations who have been successfully partnering with disability service organisations to achieve inclusive arts practice in the community.

As you read the personal accounts of the experiences of each of the arts organisations and their partners, you will find examples of what achieving inclusion actually means to the people involved in each of the projects. The stories of each project also highlight some of the challenges faced along the way.

It is hoped that these stories inspire other arts and community organisations to 'open' their arts project and embrace inclusion.

• • • • •  
• **21% of the**  
• **Western Australian**  
• **population has**  
• **some form of**  
• **disability<sup>1</sup>. The**  
• **DAII Pilot Program**  
• **highlights that one**  
• **of the greatest**  
• **assets of our**  
• **community is its**  
• **diversity. As we**  
• **begin to open**  
• **our minds to the**  
• **possibilities, we**  
• **start to truly benefit**  
• **from that diversity**  
• **in unexpected**  
• **ways.**

• <sup>1</sup> ABS 2003 Disability,  
• Ageing and Carers,  
• Australia: Summary of  
• Findings – State Tables  
• for Western Australia.  
• Cat.No. 4430.0.  
• Canberra.

# Case Study 1

## Inclusive theatre for young people

### **Barking Gecko Theatre Company in partnership with the WA Deaf Society.**

With the nature of theatre generally excluding patrons with hearing impairments, there are issues that need to be addressed in order to make performances accessible to the broadest range of young people.

Through the DAII Pilot Program, Barking Gecko Theatre Company partnered with the WA Deaf Society and schools in the Mosman Park and Shenton Park areas to create inclusive performances and workshops designed to address the issue of low attendance by the hearing impaired community at theatre performances and performance-based workshops.

.....

The genesis of the project was the realisation that the hearing impaired community were unable to fully experience any of Barking Gecko's performances. Changes had to be made to ensure the company's core values were being acted upon.

"It's something the company has recognised as a really valuable thing for us to do," says Katherine McLean, Barking Gecko's General Manager.

"One of our core tenets is to make theatre accessible to everybody, particularly kids who may suffer from disadvantage or are disadvantaged in such a way that they can't experience theatre or the performing arts."

### **Project beginnings**

The DAII Pilot Program opened up the possibility for Barking Gecko to work with the WA Deaf Society in a meaningful way that had not been possible before.

"Barking Gecko has worked on short term projects previously with people of varying degrees of ability, so we have tutors on hand who work with people with disabilities, and we sometimes work in special needs schools and with children on a short-term, as needs be basis," Ms McLean says.

Ms McLean's involvement with the project occurred in the final stages, towards the end of the Pilot Program.

"Everyone was pretty excited about the project and how successful it had been and that there would be a great focus by the company on ensuring there was authentic engagement with young children who were hearing-impaired.

**“I think Barking Gecko saw it as an opportunity to expand our service and make true to our mission on making it accessible and we just saw it in perfect alignment with our company values.”**

The company established a partnership with WA Deaf Society and Mosman Park School for Deaf Children. Training was undertaken by everyone in the company to ensure they were aware of the project and had the skills and knowledge to be able to work with the deaf and people with hearing impairments.

### **Two stage approach**

The first stage was to take the existing performance of their production **Skylab** and make it inclusive. Barking Gecko realised that presenting an AUSLAN-interpreted performance was integral to forming the connection.

“We already had our program in place and we just integrated this program on top of it. It wasn’t rocket science; it was just a matter of recognising the importance of it. An AUSLAN-interpreted performance was the simplest thing we did and the thing we maintain in all of our performances now,” says Ms McLean.

“With all of our productions we now do a schools-interpreted performance and a public show, and we market those shows to deaf schools.”

The project continued with the Mosman Park School and a series of workshops encouraging the children to be involved in creating a performance. With funds left over from their first stage of the project, Barking Gecko worked on a second stage. Rather than creating workshops solely for the Mosman Park School for the Deaf, the workshops were created with inclusion in mind.

“The first stage was to do a workshop with hearing impaired kids and the second stage

was to deepen that experience and make it an integrated workshop,” Ms McLean says.

“The first workshop was predominantly for deaf children and essentially that was to utilise performance art to create expression and also do an interpretative performance of **Skylab**. We took that a step further in the next stage by taking down some of the barriers faced by hearing impaired children engaging with hearing children, and so we created a workshop with the two groups. Four schools – Mosman Park School for Deaf Children, Mosman Park Primary School, Rosalie Primary School and Hollywood Primary School all worked together to explore the use of story and performance regardless of whether they could hear or not.”

By joining together children of similar ages, Barking Gecko hoped to expand on the inclusive nature of the project.

“They were primary school ages – Years Five and Six. We had four classes and 106



Photo courtesy of Barking Gecko Theatre Company

children (19 deaf students and 87 hearing students) and 15 teachers involved.”

The tutors were trained in the protocol of working with the hearing-impaired.

“All of the staff and tutors working on the project did deaf awareness training, then the tutors ran workshops and we did set tours of the production **Gogo Fish**. Essentially what we did was break them into four groups of mixed ability and the deaf children were able to teach the hearing children sign language and then together they created a piece of theatre,” says Ms McLean.

The workshops enabled the children from the Mosman Park School for Deaf Children to teach the children without impairment how to communicate in AUSLAN. In this way the children with the impairments were able to actively involve themselves in the workshops in a more inclusive nature.

The project has also inspired the company to think about other ways of getting involved in similar activities.

“We have done other things like touch tours for sight-impaired kids. What we do, is first conduct a touch tour of the costumes and set with the children, so they get to feel what the costumes are like and then they’re told the costumes are red or pink and that this is a door that leads to the foyer area, for example. For sight-impaired children we’ve done a few of those touch tours, which enhances their experience of the theatre.

“The other thing we have done is offer the opportunity to have the theatre piece orally transcribed, so if you are sight-impaired you are able to have the touch tour and then sit

in the theatre and listen to what is unfolding before you.

“All of this has been predominantly focused on the hearing impaired. In regards to working with other disabilities at Barking Gecko, we are often asked to conduct a series of workshops with children of varying abilities, and what we usually do is find a tutor who has training in that area and then we really work with the teachers and carers to tailor that workshop to exactly what they need.”

The inclusive nature of the Barking Gecko partnership has had a positive impact on other parts of their business. Considering what is limiting to the deaf community in terms of popular culture makes Barking Gecko determined to continue the work beyond the initial project.

“I think with initiatives like this it allows us to be able to explore these options”, Ms McLean says. “What the DAII Pilot Program did was allow us to build relationships and explore how best we could service the hearing impaired community. Without that initiative it would have taken Barking Gecko a longer period of time to be able to initiate such a thing.

“You realise that these children don’t get the opportunity to go to the cinema, they don’t get the opportunity to go and see theatre, they don’t get to listen to radio – so there is a whole heap of things that fully-hearing people get to experience that’s just out of range for hearing-impaired children. So it is very important that Barking Gecko continues to provide AUSLAN-interpreted performances so that they are at least given that opportunity.”

## Results

The relationships established during the DAII Pilot Program have continued for Barking Gecko and the WA Deaf Society.

“We’ve since created relationships with the AUSLAN interpreting service. In fact they nominated us, and we won the organisation of the year award in the AUSLAN Awards of WA,” says Ms McLean.

Receiving this award in July 2009 is just one show of recognition for opening up theatre to hearing-impaired children. The signed performances are now part of every public production.

**“Generally I think the whole project was really successful. It has economic benefits for Barking Gecko in terms of audience numbers. I think all of the kids, both the hearing and the impaired, were extraordinarily open to it and pretty excited by it. Hearing-impaired children were really excited to be able to teach other kids their language. It was a pretty amazing workshop.”**



Photo courtesy of Barking Gecko Theatre Company

## Outline of project

Barking Gecko used the DAII Pilot Project to create their own relationship with the WA Deaf Society and make theatre more accessible for young people with hearing impairments through AUSLAN-interpreted performances and theatre workshops.

## Partners

**Barking Gecko Theatre Company** is Western Australia’s professional theatre company, performing for young people 5-17 years and their families. The company resides in the Subiaco Arts Centre.

**WA Deaf Society** is a non-profit organisation established in 1921 to provide services to deaf and hard of hearing people in WA.

**Mosman Park School for Deaf Children** provides primary and pre-primary programs for students who communicate through sign language.

## Outcomes

Barking Gecko was awarded ‘**Organisation of the Year**’ at the 2009 WA AUSLAN Awards. The theatre company has continued to develop inclusion initiatives as part of its programming, including running integrated drama workshops for school children with hearing impairments. Barking Gecko now schedules at least one signed show for all of the company’s public performances.

# Case Study 2

## Experiencing arts through touch

### **The Art Gallery of Western Australia (AGWA) in partnership with Vision Australia and Sculpture by the Sea.**

For vision-impaired people, touch is the main way to acquire information or access a work of art. By feeling the shape of a piece and its textures, you are able to imagine the work. If also assisted by a guide who can fill in the missing gaps of information, a person with vision impairments is then able to experience and appreciate art in a similar way to a person with full vision.

AGWA had been conducting successful touch tours of specific works at the Gallery for some time, but as part of the DAII Pilot Program the Art Gallery was able to expand on these tours and integrate the program with the annual **Sculpture by the Sea** exhibition.

.....

“As a part of a family day in 2001, we had our first touch tour for people who were sight impaired and their families, which was incredibly successful,” says Lesley Goodman, educator at AGWA. “People were able to touch the sculptures; it was quite unique as not a lot of other galleries do it.

“After that we had Sensational Art days where we trawled through the gallery stores downstairs with a conservator and looked for artworks which were sturdy enough for touch tours. We selected works from our collection – about eight of them – and set up a special exhibition. We worked closely with a conservator to see what was suitable, because obviously you can’t have works that are too fragile, have pointy edges, or are badly positioned.”

The idea to branch out the touch tours beyond the confines of the Gallery came about from Pam Barras, a consumer representative on the Disability Services Planning Committee at the Department of Culture and the Arts (DCA) and coordinator of Vizhelp, a support group for parents of the blind or vision-impaired.

“Pam came to one of the touch tours and was blown away by the whole experience,” Ms Goodman says. “She had also been to the **Sculpture by the Sea** exhibition in 2008 and was struck by the thought that it would make a lot of sense to have touch tours there. There was an obvious connection because we had the skills and guides, and funding from the DAII project provided the money to train people and the resources to organise it.”

### **The training**

In order to prepare for the touch tours, 28 of the Art Gallery’s staff and volunteer guides participated in training with Caroline Lewis of Vision Australia.

“Caroline came into the Gallery twice because it’s better to have smaller groups and some of the training was theoretical about the various impairments,” Goodman says. “She has glasses that you can put on to simulate vision-impairments, so you get to see what it’s like for someone with cataracts, for example. A lot of it was hands-on, just walking around with these glasses on and going up to the Gallery and doing touch tours – it was an experiential training program.”

Gallery guide, Fay Thurling, who has been a volunteer guide at the Gallery for over

12 years, agreed the training was an integral part of the process.

“You have to be aware that just because there’s a vision-impairment it doesn’t mean they’re completely blind,” Ms Thurling says. “You need to keep the person you’re guiding fully aware of what you’re doing and be aware yourself of any possible snags. Getting to try out various visual impairments in the training, some of them were quite scary. For example, you couldn’t see very much coming down stairs and you became aware of just how dependent you are of the person leading you.”

Once the **Sculpture by the Sea** exhibition was in place at Cottesloe Beach in March 2009, Lesley Goodman, Pam Barras and Caroline Lewis went to the beach to select the work for the touch tours.

“Not every work is suitable for a touch tour, so we looked at the works together with the curator of **Sculpture by the Sea**,” Ms Goodman says. “Things like access and how close the beach is are important, and a few people had seeing-eye dogs, so we had to make sure that the sculptures we chose were suitable.”



Photo courtesy of Art Gallery of WA

The Art Gallery's relationships with partners such as Vision Australia were instrumental to the success of the project.

"The partnerships are something we need to build upon if we're going to be involved in **Sculpture by the Sea** in the future. I think it takes time to build up relationships for a program to get going. There are quite a few organisations in Perth who support people with visual impairments, so it's a matter of building up relationships with them too."

## The tour

The **Sculpture by the Sea** touch tours began with a meeting on the beach with the curator about the artworks followed by a 45-minute tour with a guide, which would either involve the participant and their carer, or just the participant with a seeing-eye dog. Eight sight-impaired people participated in the program.

For the first time in Australia, sight-impaired visitors to the **Sculpture by the Sea** exhibition were able to fully appreciate and interact with the sculptures on display at the beach.

"The participants were absolutely blown away by the experience," Ms Goodman says. "The feedback was extremely positive. Most of them had never done anything like that before. Pam Barras brought two of her friends who didn't know much about art, but they were really quite moved by the whole experience."

Gallery guide Fay Thurling agreed it was a successful project and one which highlighted that sight-impaired people could participate fully in a popular community event.



Photo courtesy of Art Gallery of WA

"It went very well. I was very comfortable with the man I was taking around," Ms Thurling says. "When you're doing it, you don't even think of the general public, but the general public were obviously very much aware of what was going on, and they reported back to the base tent that they were fascinated."

**“I felt good, the participants felt good and the general public were impressed.”**

"The man I took around was visually-impaired but he knew shapes and colours. He was quite interesting because he responded best to the sculptures that were very representative. The ones that were abstract were hard for him to comprehend because they were very large and he could only feel a part of it, so he couldn't get the whole effect."

Beryl Matthews, another participant in the **Sculpture by the Sea** touch tours program, said she really enjoyed and appreciated the day.

“It was beautiful,” she says. “I didn’t initially think much of it because I didn’t think I would be able to feel it or see it, but we were allowed to handle all of them and it fascinated me that my interpretation was nothing like the sculptures,” she laughs. “Each sculpture was differently designed and built – it was very exciting actually.

“I had been into the Art Gallery and handled a lot of the works in there, but this was entirely different. You had the chance to walk with a guide who would explain the sculptures. She let us put our own interpretation on it and it was interesting to see how the sculpture and I didn’t agree,” she laughs.

## The challenges

According to the feedback received from participants, everybody enjoyed the tours and found it to be a worthwhile exercise, but the sight-impaired community did not support the event as much as the Gallery had hoped.

“Somebody booked in a big group and they didn’t come,” Ms Goodman says. “It was very disappointing because we had the guides ready to go and everything was set up, and then for some reason, they didn’t come. There are a lot of areas that we need to overcome if we do it again.”

Pam Barras who helped with the whole planning of the event and participated in the touch tours, said support from the sight-impaired community would come in time.

“It will happen, it’s just that it is something new and different,” Ms Barras explains. “Not the sort of thing that people with low vision

would be used to doing. Some people are a bit reluctant and they don’t quite have the confidence to go out and participate.

“But they know what it is and they’re told about it, or they listen to an article about it or hear verbal feedback and get a better appreciation. As it becomes a regular thing it will become more popular and the numbers will probably increase,” Ms Barras said.

## The future

The Art Gallery of Western Australia has again provided free touch tours to vision impaired visitors at **Sculpture by the Sea** in 2010, and hopes to extend its participation in future years.

“It is important for people to see that people with vision-impairments can be out in the community and they can do the same things that everybody else can,” Ms Goodman says. “There are a lot of sight-impaired children in the school population, and **Sculpture by the Sea** runs a schools program as well, so we would like to combine the touch tours with school groups and their practical art workshops.”

“I would also like to start having ongoing relationships with participants and other people involved, like Blind Citizens WA. We now have a whole group of guides who are trained up in vision awareness and we also got a lot of outside publicity through local newspapers and radio, which is great visibility for the Gallery.”

## Outline of project

The Art Gallery of Western Australia held tactile tours at the 2009 Sculpture by the Sea exhibition at Cottesloe Beach for people with vision impairments.

## Partners

The **Art Gallery of Western Australia** aims to increase the knowledge and appreciation of the arts for the enjoyment and cultural, artistic, educational and intellectual enrichment of the people of WA and its visitors.

**Vision Australia** is a partnership between people who are blind, partially-sighted or have low vision. They are united by their passion that in the future people who are blind or have low vision will have access to, and fully participate in every part of life they choose.

**Sculpture by the Sea** in Western Australia is an annual event that features over 60 local, interstate and international artists who transform Perth's Cottesloe beach into a stunning sculpture park overlooking the Indian Ocean.

## Outcomes

The Art Gallery of Western Australia received the Vision Australia **'Making a Difference'** Award for best practice for the **Sculpture by the Sea** Touch Tours project. Pam Barras was a finalist in the Disability Services Commission **'Count Us In'** Awards 2009.

Using the same training module developed in the DAII pilot project, the Art Gallery is working with the Alzheimer's Association on a tactile series for 80 to 100 participants.



Photos courtesy of Art Gallery of WA

# Case Study 3

## Taking accessibility online

### **Propel Youth Arts WA in partnership with the Swan Friendship Club of Western Australia and Junkadelic.**

The original project planned by Propel Youth Arts WA for the **DAII Pilot** project was to enable people with disabilities to access and experience positive connections to arts and cultural activities through holding inclusive workshops and performances in conjunction with National Youth Week.

Due to a change in the organisation's strategic direction, the redesigned project saw a membership push for the organisation and a wider awareness of making projects and workshops inclusive and accessible for all young people.

Project Coordinator Susannah Day joined Propel Youth Arts WA in January 2008, during the 'Create' stage of the **DAII Pilot** Project.

.....

Propel Youth Arts WA recognised that while they aimed to represent all young people with an interest in the arts, very few of their membership base were people with disabilities. This process of evaluation identified the need for improvement in Propel's key communication methods; website and fortnightly e-zine, to ensure that all young people with a disability can access, engage and participate in the arts.

### **The approach**

The Propel Youth Arts DAII project was developed with a two-stage approach. This involved redesigning their website and reassessing their membership strategies, followed by an inclusive workshop series in partnership with Swan Friendship Club and Junkadelic.

"The first stage was a marketing and membership strategy rewrite. We are a membership organisation that supports and advocates for young artists and we're supposed to be doing that for all young artists, whether they are with or without a disability; everyone across the board," says Ms Day.

**“We try to be as inclusive as possible but for the DAII Project we re-evaluated and found that we weren't, and that our membership and our marketing weren't as inclusive as they could be.**

"Therefore young artists with disabilities weren't engaging with our services. Propel staff members went through some training to understand what constituted accessible and inclusive marketing. This included training in design, project management and events coordination.

"A majority of all of our marketing is through an online website and we realised that a lot of the time it wasn't accessible to young people with disabilities, so we needed to do something about that. So the first thing we did was get our old website audited. It was then that we recognised what we were doing wrong; things like the font wasn't big enough and there wasn't information about accessibility for venues, things like that."

The reconstructed website, audited by The Association for the Blind, included such enhancements as having everything in a larger font, colour coded sections, streamlined menus and options, larger points to click for easier navigation through the site and further accessibility information on each event.

“Because we have other arts organisations’ information on our website, it has prompted other organisations to think about accessibility and companion cards and what they can do about the accessibility and inclusiveness of their events. Our aim is to be the first stop for all young people wanting arts information,” Ms Day said.

To accompany the website redesign, Propel Youth Arts’ Communication and Marketing Officer wrote the organisation’s first Accessibility and Inclusion Strategy. The document outlined many practical measures to be implemented by the organisation in 2010.

## The partnerships

The second phase of the project involved connecting with the Swan Friendship

Club in Midland to create inclusive music workshops.

“We partnered with Swan Friendship Club, a non-profit club based in Midland,” Ms Day says. “The Club came about because parents of children with intellectual disabilities saw that there was a major need for their children to have friendships outside of school. Once they got out of that structured school environment they were losing those friendships and were becoming lonely and were not being engaged in the community.

“A lot of disability services are respite services created to give parents a break. It was explained to me that they were putting kids on a bus from four to 25 years of age and taking them to a movie or bowling. There was no independence or self-autonomy for the young people with disabilities.



Photographer Janusz Strzelecki

“Given that we are an advocacy organisation and not a producing body we didn’t have the skills to facilitate these workshops so we engaged Junkadelic, a recycling music junk band who had worked with Swan Friendship Club previously. We thought it was perfect since they’re an inclusive organisation that understands how to work with people with disabilities,” says Ms Day.

Although Junkadelic had worked with Swan Friendship Club before, further training was facilitated to train the group about more severe intellectual disabilities so they would be prepared for the workshops. The project enabled Propel Youth Arts WA to better understand how to work with young artists across the board.

“We’ve only been around since 2003 so we’re really quite young and I think this

was a great chance for us to evaluate our strategic direction in terms of how we are going to engage with young people with disabilities in the future. I don’t think we had engaged much in the Swan districts or the northern suburbs before either. So this project gave us a wonderful chance to engage with two new communities.

“What we were initially trying to do was write the marketing strategy first in order to attract young people to these workshops. But in the end they ran concurrently.”

The workshops with Junkadelic revolved around making instruments from recycled materials and devising two pieces for performance through improvisation.

“We were hoping that young people from the City of Swan area without disabilities would be included in the workshop series



Photographer Janusz Strzelecki



Photographer Janusz Strzelecki

and the desired outcome was that an inclusive performance would be created by people with and without disabilities. But the young people without disabilities who we got to come to the workshops didn't stay.

"I think it was really challenging," Ms Day says. "There's a large difference between young people with severe intellectual disabilities and physical difficulties. The young people with intellectual disabilities far outweighed the people without. My feeling, from what I've been told, was that there was a sense of inversion of the minority, so it was really confronting for young people without disability."

## The performance

The performance was intended to be a part of the City of Swan's Hyper Festival. When the City revised their strategic planning and decided not to hold the festival in 2009, the performance was moved and included in the 2009 Channel 7 Christmas Pageant.

"The outcome of the workshops is that they created a roaming parade performance and a theatre style performance. So they

did the parade performance as part of the pageant."

The participants in the workshops enjoyed their experience, continuing the workshops with Junkadelic with the assistance of another grant, which Propel Youth Arts WA helped establish with Healthway's Be Active message.

"The participants loved it and the reason we chose them to be the core participants of our DAII Project was because they had worked with Junkadelic before and had created a great relationship with the facilitators. The Swan Friendship Club wanted to continue to employ Junkadelic, but just didn't have the funds, so we were able to come through. Ours was a pilot project in terms of Propel Youth Arts WA's partnership with Junkadelic and Swan Friendship Club," says Ms Day.

## The benefits

The success of the project has been due to unexpected benefits more than planned activities.

"I think that it was successful in a way. I think the inclusiveness in terms of the

workshops and the physical outcome wasn't successful, but I think that's great for us to acknowledge and recognise that we didn't do it in the best way we could. It made us realise that we don't always create inclusive events.

**“I think the training we've gone through as an organisation, and particularly myself as the Project Coordinator, has been fantastic in making sure everything we do is inclusive. I think we'll now go away and think about what we can do to make everything more inclusive, every single project and every piece of information and marketing, to ensure that young people with disabilities do have the opportunity to engage,” reflects Ms Day.**

“It also means that one person with a disability doesn't have the same needs as another person with a disability and we don't want to assume that all young people with disabilities have the same needs.”

The changes to the website and membership formats have had more obvious instant success, despite being ongoing.

The links with the Swan Friendship Club and Junkadelic have produced some strong partnerships. Propel Youth Arts WA has continued to work with the Swan Friendship Club beyond the DAII project. Propel Youth Arts WA will continue to support them to deliver arts workshops to young people and they hope that the DAII project will have long lasting benefits to the Swan Friendship Club members and the wider youth arts community.

## Outline of project

To ensure young people with disabilities, their families and carers are able to access and participate in arts and cultural services. The project was in two stages. The first stage involved updating the website and accessibility strategy. The second was to hold workshops that would result in a public performance.

## Partners

**Propel Youth Arts WA** is a membership-based, not-for-profit organisation that provides a range of programs and services across art forms that connect, support and promote young artists.

**Swan Friendship Club of Western Australia Inc** endeavours to enhance the well-being and quality of life of young people with disabilities through recreational activities.

## Outcomes

As a result of the workshops, a theatre and percussive parade by the Frog Rockin' Band was performed as part of the Channel 7 Christmas Pageant in December 2009, with ongoing potential. Propel Youth Arts WA also created a new website to enable increased accessibility to their services.

# Case Study 4

## Arts for everyone

### Accessibility for profoundly disabled arts and culture patrons.

#### Country Arts WA in partnership with the National Disability Services WA.

Ensuring access to a venue is only the first step in ensuring the inclusiveness of an event. Some people with severe and profound disabilities need to be accompanied by a full time carer when attending arts performances.

Through the DAII Pilot Project, Country Arts WA and the National Disability Services WA partnered to introduce the Companion Card into regional areas of Western Australia.

The Companion Card allows people with a significant disability, who require lifelong attendant care, to participate in community activities and events. Cards are presented at participating organisations where cardholders are not required to pay an admission fee for their companion who is providing attendant care.

.....



Photo courtesy of Country Arts WA

As a facilitator rather than an arts organisation, Country Arts WA approached the DAII Pilot Program from the perspective of spreading awareness and opening up the programs they facilitate to a more inclusive audience.

**“Our project was a bit different from most of the DAII projects in that it was a way of introducing our partners into our already established program in a promotional capacity. It was a recognition that not only could we do more, but that the community organisations that we deal with could be encouraged to work with the Companion Card program,”** explains Philippa Maughan, Country Art’s Performing Arts Touring Officer.

### The first step

Country Arts WA recognised that arts projects need more than just physically accessible venues to be inclusive. People with severe disabilities need around the clock care and often cannot attend artistic and cultural events partly because of the financial strain on their carers.

Country Arts WA then set about connecting with their partners in various regional and rural areas to increase awareness and encourage affiliation with the Companion Card program.

“The intent of our program was that we would have the community presenters (hosts of touring performance companies) sign up to the Companion Card program and the cardholders would buy their tickets with their

Companion Card, so the cardholder pays a concession price and their companion is free,” Ms Maughan says.

## Regional access

As part of their focus on regional areas, Country Arts WA promoted the Companion Card through a tour of a theatre performance called **The Gun** by kompany M to regional areas of Western Australia.

**“We were able to meet people and presenters and talk to community groups along the way, raising regional awareness of the Companion Card program and attracting more affiliates.”**

As a promotional tool, Country Arts WA hosted a function at a performance by pianist David Helfgott in Albany and invited potential affiliates of the program so they could meet a family whose lives have been helped by the Companion Card program.

“We invited a local Companion Card holder, Natalie, with her family as well as potential affiliates so they could hear Natalie’s family speak about how they use the Companion Card and how it improves Natalie’s quality of life. And again, there were some services and venues around Albany that signed up as a result of that,” explains Ms Maughan.

## Personal experiences

Natalie’s mother, Debbie explains that the advent of the Companion Card has opened up many more possibilities for Natalie and her family.

“Our goal as a family is to make sure Natalie has a happy life and experiences as much of life as she possibly can,” says Debbie. “Before the Companion Card was introduced, Nat would go out with a carer but it was expensive with the cost of the carer’s wage and entrance fees to venues. As a result Nat didn’t go out much with the carer, they mainly stayed at home.

“We definitely try more things now with Nat because if we have to leave unexpectedly, the cost of entry doesn’t matter as the companion with Nat doesn’t have to pay.”

Country Arts WA has also reviewed the way that the organisation supports programs, ensuring that events are held with inclusion in mind.

“We’re an affiliate with the Companion Card program and in our touring venues we encourage people to become affiliates. We have plans to include a clause in our contracts that require a funding recipient that is hosting a ticketed event to recognise the Companion Card. Our role has been as an instigator and awareness raising body. We’re reminding our clients that there are people in their community that need this service,” says Ms Maughan.

Venues in larger regional centres are already on board due to further advocacy and presentations.

“A presentation was made to the Country Arts WA Board and then to the CircuitWest network which are the major venues in WA, and they became Companion Card affiliates. Because the towns where they are based are larger centres with disability service coordinators and support services,

there are more cardholders in those towns and it's been of benefit to more people," says Ms Maughan.

For Debbie and Natalie, the Companion Card has brought many more benefits already.

"We have had some great experiences together using the Companion Card," Debbie explains. "We do generally go out more now that we have this card. For example, when we go to Perth to visit family, we always make time to take Nat to the movies. We choose something that we feel Nat would like or enjoy, even though we don't particularly feel this is what we want to watch, it doesn't matter because the companion gets in for free. She doesn't tend to watch TV much, but she loves going to the cinema. She seems to watch part of the movies, and she reacts to the action on screen. It's great to see her clap her hands and have a giggle even when no one else is. Quite often the family would rather watch Nat's reactions than the actual movie as she is having such a great time."

## Outline of project

To support the attendance and participation of people with disabilities at live performance in regional WA through the Companion Card program.

## Partners

**Country Arts WA** helps regional communities to access culture and the arts as part of their community development. They are an independent not-for-profit organisation and receive funding to deliver programs on behalf of the State and Federal Governments.

**National Disability Services** is the national industry association for disability services, representing over 650 not-for-profit organisations.

## Outcomes

A larger group of Companion Card affiliates in regional and rural WA and plans for a new clause in Country Arts WA funding contracts to ensure that the Companion Card is recognised at the funded event.

# Case Study 5

## Improving the live theatre experience

### Accessibility beyond the built environment.

#### Perth Theatre Trust in partnership with Subiaco Arts Centre, Barking Gecko Theatre Company and Senses Foundation.

Once you are inside the theatre, what happens in terms of participation? After the State Government's \$4.7million refurbishment of Subiaco Arts Centre in 2006, good inroads had been made at the venue in regard to the physical access of the building, but further work had to be done to make the artistic works more accessible for those with vision impairments.

Through the DAII Pilot Project, Perth Theatre Trust in partnership with Subiaco Arts Centre, Barking Gecko Theatre Company and Senses Foundation aimed to improve the live theatre experience for patrons with vision impairments.

.....  
"Subiaco Arts Centre had been refurbished which included improved accessibility at the venue, for example all the signs for the toilets, rooms and lifts are in Braille, as well as the addition of a tactile sensor on floor surfaces and stairs," Deborah Mickle, Manager Contracts at the Perth Theatre Trust explains.

"So we've made some great improvements and received recognition for some of the things we've done in the built environment, but we needed to look at the performance side too."

### Turning ideas into reality

While Perth Theatre Trust had some ideas about how to achieve this, the dilemma was how do you take those ideas and progress them? Along came the DAII Pilot Project.

"My role was project management, including talking to Barking Gecko and Subiaco Arts Centre about what was essentially just a concept – did we have a workable concept which would meet the criteria for project funding?" Ms Mickle says.

"So initially it was about creating an interest and connection and then taking this forward", she continues. "There had been some ideas at a venue level about audio description some time ago, so this was an obvious springboard into the DAII Project. It was beneficial that there had already been discussions and some ideas about accessibility and the arts in a broader sense than what we were delivering."

Perth Theatre Trust already had established relationships with Subiaco Arts Centre and Barking Gecko Theatre Company, but had not met with Senses Foundation until the partnering day organised by the Department of Culture and the Arts (DCA) and the Disability Services Commission (DSC) in April 2007.

### Finding a partner

A requirement of the DAII Pilot Project was partnering with a disability services organisation to gain a better understanding of the needs of people with disabilities, and to start creating new and sustainable, across-sector relationships.

During the partnering day, there was a 'get to know each other' session.

"We were open to partnering with a number of organisations," Ms Mickle says. "And following a number of approaches to partner with organisations, and not really making much ground, we came to focus on Senses.

**“The strength of the partnership can really make or break a project’s progression. The relationship and being on the same wave length as our contact person at Senses was wonderful.**

"It sounds simplistic, but issues such as timing and locked-in production dates are crucial and therefore required us to match a partner to our production dates," explains Ms Mickle.



Photo courtesy of Perth Theatre Trust

The initial hitches in establishing a partnership stemmed from a lack of understanding about the project, what it entailed and what Perth Theatre Trust wanted to achieve.

Another vital success factor in forming a partnership was finding the right person to connect with in large organisations.

"I believe there's probably a person in every organisation who would go, 'great – when can we meet?' but finding that person can sometimes be the challenge. That was part of the reason why DCA did the introduction day which included 'meet and greet' sessions. It was fantastic because you got to talk to people directly and discuss ideas for collaboration. As we sat at tables and people talked about what they did, you could see the cogs turning; it was like electricity racing around the room," recalls Ms Mickle.

For Perth Theatre Trust, Barking Gecko were an ideal choice to partner with as the company resides in the Subiaco Arts Centre.

"We looked at their performance program to see what was suited to the DAll Pilot Project and the **The Troll from the Bowl** production was selected. The production was commencing at the beginning of our time schedule, so we needed to initiate many tasks in order to do the production as a DAll project with them."

The **Troll from the Bowl** continues the story of Three Billy Boats Gruff, from the perspective of the troll, Noel, who is chased into the river through the sewer and appears out of young Billy's loo.

“It was very graphic and funny and it was shown during the school holidays in July 2007,” Ms Mickle explains. “It had three actors that played six characters and it was very colourful and dynamic.

“Part of doing the touch tour and the introduction through the DAII Pilot Project for people with vision impairment was to feel the sense of aliveness of the costumes and to recognise via voice that there were actually all these different characters on stage.”

## Training

A critical component of the partnership included the training of actors and everyone involved in the project to ensure readiness for conducting familiarisation tours at Subiaco Arts Centre, along with tactile tours of the production **The Troll from the Bowl**.

**“We identified in the project plan that everyone involved in the project needed to be comfortable and relaxed and were aware about the needs of vision impaired people,”** Ms Mickle explains.

“Training was conducted by the Senses Foundation using the physical layout of the theatre and production elements to improve our understanding of patron needs.”

Actors held tactile tours 45 minutes before the show started. The story of the production was explained and the DAII participants were given a short synopsis and the script beforehand.

“Actors explained the characters they played and their different voices and characteristics. There were props, like a really big toilet brush which was six foot

long, and the troll had exaggerated features which included a large tummy, hands and feet and a mass of dreadlocked hair with wonderful tactile qualities. The actors took the participants onto the stage and they were guided around the set and could feel what the toilet was like and how big it was, with the set layout explained to them,” Ms Mickle says.

“This orientation for patrons who were visually impaired worked really well and the participants absolutely loved it.”

There was a mixed group of participants, which included some mature adults and children who were visually impaired, and also parents with visually impaired children.

Being involved in the project has provided a lot of confidence for Perth Theatre Trust.



Photo courtesy of Perth Theatre Trust

“The project gave us the stepping stones to continue with access improvements for performances,” Ms Mickle says.

“I think the great thing about this initiative was the opportunity to experiment and the capacity to try something out and work it through and go, ‘that was a really good idea and these are the elements that really worked and these are the parts we would do differently if we had the opportunity to do it again’. It was a trial run.”

## Future improvements

In terms of feedback from the participants, some points worth noting were that while they agreed touch tours made an enormous improvement to the theatre experience for patrons with vision impairment, to augment this improvement, audio description was recommended.

“As a result of this we have introduced audio description, so now this can be offered by the production companies. With the equipment now available, Perth Theatre Trust can facilitate the addition of audio description for a performance,” Ms Mickle says.

Perth Theatre Trust is keen to encourage more tactile tours, however, Ms Mickle acknowledges that it can be challenging due to production priorities.

“This is because you have the combination of actors needing to prepare for the performance and you have an audience coming into the theatre.

“Tactile tours and audio description are standard practice worldwide and nationally so there are opportunities for further learning.



Photo courtesy of Perth Theatre Trust

“We’re keen to do a second project to look at audio description and really build awareness amongst the theatre companies that it’s available and how they can get the most out of it, and encourage them to do a tactile tour along with it. The other side of that would also be looking at how to build our volunteer base, in order to make the service more readily available,” Ms Mickle concludes.

## Outline of project

Perth Theatre Trust wanted to conduct a tactile theatre performance and a familiarisation tour at the Subiaco Arts Centre for people with low vision.

## Partners

**Perth Theatre Trust** is responsible for the operation of a number of performing arts venues in Perth including His Majesty's Theatre, Perth Concert Hall, Playhouse Theatre and Subiaco Arts Centre.

**Subiaco Arts Centre** is a multi-purpose venue with three performance areas including a main auditorium, studio and outdoor amphitheatre.

**Barking Gecko Theatre Company** is Western Australia's professional theatre company performing for young people 5-17 years and their families. The company resides in the Subiaco Arts Centre.

**Senses Foundation Inc** is a charitable organisation providing disability support services to people of all ages in Western Australia. Senses Foundation's speciality is providing services to people who are deafblind.

## Outcomes

Perth Theatre Trust created 'How to' flyers of the tours for their venues. They also conducted a comprehensive evaluation with project partners and patrons with low vision. Perth Theatre Trust also now offers audio transcription services in their venues as part of the hire agreement, which was a recommendation that transpired from the DAII Pilot Program.

# Case Study 6

## Growing community arts

### Victoria Park Centre for the Arts in partnership with Nulsen.

For nearly a decade the Victoria Park Centre for the Arts has been including the work of artists with disabilities in their community projects through a partnership with Nulsen – a not-for-profit organisation supporting people with severe and profound intellectual disabilities. The partnership grew organically after Nulsen came to the centre to hire space.

Through a series of projects, workshops and collaborations within the Arts Centre, Nulsen residents have thrived in the arts community and found a place in the larger Victoria Park community.

Rowena Skinner of Victoria Park Centre for the Arts and Patti Ferber of Nulsen tell of their mutually beneficial partnership and how it has developed.

.....  
The partnership between Victoria Park Centre for the Arts and Nulsen was not part of the DAII Pilot Project, but is an excellent example of an innovative partnership between an arts and a disability organisation.

“We came in at the end of the DAII Pilot Project, but it worked out well,” explains Victoria Park Centre for the Arts’ treasurer Rowena Skinner. “We didn’t structure it; it just went that way. Our partnership is an organic process.”

### Strong partnership

The organic growth of the partnership has ensured its strength. It began with the idea of getting the residents of Nulsen integrated further into the community.

“We’re a residential facility,” says Patti Ferber of Nulsen, “so our aim is to have people getting out into the community for their arts and cultural experiences. That’s where the partnership began with Victoria Park Centre for the Arts because we initially started by just renting a space for a couple of hours for a young man to be able to go there and practice his art. That was about nine years ago.”

Rowena Skinner continues. “Patti Ferber wanted a space separate from Nulsen, a separate space in the community. She started hiring our Arts Centre space and running courses. Then she offered to be a volunteer and spent a bit more time here and we ended up having a few more people from Nulsen coming in and then had a few combined exhibitions.



Photo courtesy of Victoria Park Centre for the Arts

“The Arts Centre and Nulsen have also applied for some combined grants for a couple of community projects doing a water fountain and mosaic, and that worked out really well,” Rowena says. “There were also music workshops held here that we worked together on, and some of the Nulsen residents have entered artworks into our annual art award. There’s been a lot of cross assistance programs and shared smaller projects over the last seven or eight years.”

The structure of both organisations and their individual focus on inclusion within the community only made the partnership stronger, easier and more viable.

**“There’s always been a bit of an ethos at the Centre,” says Patti. “It’s actually built into their constitution that there is an element of community inclusion and access for all - it’s been very willingly practiced.**

“The management at Nulsen right from the very beginning, were really willing to support the Centre because of the way it supported our people and the recognition for equal opportunities in the community.”

Patti Ferber’s increasing presence at the Art Centre helped in the initial stages of the partnership.

“I began to put in a few hours as a volunteer at the Centre and would support whatever project was going on at the time, providing help as needed,” says Ms Ferber.

“We began to use the Victoria Park Centre for the Arts and their artists as tutors through an Australia Council grant in 2000

and it’s just kept evolving from there. I think all the projects I’ve been involved with since then have had a component of Victoria Park Centre for the Arts involvement, whether it’s been using the space, hiring artists or working together on community projects - there’s been a linkage from that time on.”

## Project collaboration

The partnership between Victoria Park Centre for the Arts and Nulsen has been based on continued support and development in the interests of Nulsen’s residents. They have also collaborated on several projects.

Patti Ferber explains, “There was a joint project about two or three years ago between the Centre and what was then ACROD (Australian Council for



Photo courtesy of Victoria Park Centre for the Arts

Rehabilitation of the Disabled). We did a community ceramic and garden project. The Nulsen residents who hired the space at the Centre hosted the ceramic project, and we invited a number of different communities in, including Kent Street High School. The wider community was then invited in through the Arts Centre.

“So these different local community groups would come in at different times and work alongside Nulsen residents and together they created a water wall.”

For Patti Ferber, the question of inclusion as opposed to dedicated projects for people with disabilities comes down to two levels of inclusion.

“I think this varies depending on the different disability organisations, but for Nulsen, most of the people I have worked with over the years have severe and profound intellectual disabilities so for me there are two levels of inclusion.

“First is the opportunity for residents to sit amongst a community like that at the Arts Centre and be a practicing artist within that community and be accepted for being an individual.

“But for us I think there is also a second level need to be able to work in a dedicated small group within those situations, because it’s very difficult for a person who has severe intellectual disabilities to sit in a mainstream workshop and not be filling a token position. At the end of a two-hour workshop, that person won’t have been able to move at the same pace so there isn’t necessarily any ongoing value for the person other than being in a mainstream space.

“So being able to work at the Art Centre and develop skills and learn from skilled artists at a pace that’s dictated by the person with the disability, they sit alongside each other. What I’ve found over the years is that being able to move at their own pace enables them to then move into mainstream spaces like the Victoria Park Art Awards. If someone is just going to a workshop, unless they have a dedicated artist that is able to work with them, they would be left behind and I don’t see that as a profitable experience,” Ms Ferber explains.

## **Community involvement**

The collaboration and partnership with the Arts Centre has allowed the residents at Nulsen to discover and take on a larger role in the community.

“They’ve actually met and associations have been created with the Arts Centre and other artists. There are Nulsen residents that have from time to time been members of the Arts Centre when they’ve been involved with projects there”, says Ms Skinner. “The artists that dropped in to the Arts Centre, especially in the days when the Arts Centre was growing, would comment on the work and support what the residents were doing.

“We put on our first public exhibition at the Arts Centre in 2000 and we’ve held three others since then and it’s been very well supported. The residents have been able to move into an arts community and have their work recognised and valued,” says Ms Ferber.

The partnership has delivered more to the participants than physical outcomes like the fountain and garden projects. The enduring relationships are prized beyond that. The

movement into the larger realm of the community and further artistic opportunities are other obvious outcomes. This increased profile then leads to further developments made with people with disabilities in mind.

“Volunteers have come into the space and been quite nervous about associating with people with disabilities because it’s not something that’s been a part of their life before. Two volunteers in particular have formed really strong relationships with Nulsen residents. There have been friendships built as well as artistic and learning opportunities,” says Ms Skinner.

“Artists have also been informed by the way they’ve seen people working, just things like how people bring colours together or the way they work adapting to their disability. Artists have actually spoken of how this inspires them.

**“It’s been like a shared education and journey for people. It’s an equal learning opportunity and I think we’ve been able to bring insights around the issues of access.**

“There were some renovations done at the Art Centre and the outcomes were built around the ideas of disability access,” explains Ms Skinner.

“We had our third exhibition in December last year and that was open to tutors, friends and Nulsen residents so that was the first time we’ve held an exhibition that was actually not dedicated to people with disabilities only. This was really well received and because of that exhibition it’s going to be an annual event at the Arts Centre. Over the years four people have entered the Victoria Park Art Awards because of their direct involvement with the Arts Centre,” Ms Skinner says.



Photo courtesy of Victoria Park Centre for the Arts

## Outline of project

An ongoing partnership between the Victoria Park Centre for the Arts and Nulsen designed to enable Nulsen residents to thrive in the artist community and find a place in the larger Victoria Park community.

## Partners

### **Victoria Park Centre for the Arts**

aims to provide people of all ages, cultures and economic backgrounds with a supportive, cooperative environment in which to appreciate and present art.

**Nulsen** is acknowledged as a leader in Australia in the field of caring for people with profound and severe disabilities.

## Outcome

The partnership between the Victoria Park Centre for the Arts and Nulsen has resulted in ongoing projects, relationships and collaborations which bring the general community and the residents of Nulsen together in a more inclusive nature.



Photo courtesy of Victoria Park Centre for the Arts

# Case Study 7

## Moving dancers into the professional sphere

### Inclusion in dance performance

#### STRUT Dance

Dance performances by troupes of dancers with disabilities and performances by able-bodied dancers have historically been programmed as separate events. Although performance spaces have been designed to provide access for people with disabilities, simply constructing the spaces as accessible has rarely engaged the possibility of a combined production.

Through the DAII Pilot Project, STRUT Dance developed a performance that incorporated dancers with Down Syndrome, dancing with able-bodied professional dancers. This interpretation of German choreographer Thomas Lehmen's **Schreibstück** marked the first production of the work in Australia and the first integrated performance.

STRUT Dance Company director Agnès Michelet tells of her experience working on this production.

.....

The objective of the project was to produce a professional contemporary dance work with four dancers with Down Syndrome. It marks the first time in STRUT's program that a performance has been inclusive in this way.

"This project was actually first suggested to me, not through talking about the work with disability but generally speaking," Ms Michelet says. "When we first started talking about **Schreibstück** I didn't know it would take that direction. I just knew that it was a great concept which would enable the choreographers in Perth to show their talent and match the international benchmark,

because that concept has been produced and developed before in Europe with quite well known choreographers."

The **Schreibstück** performance revolves around a book of rules written by German choreographer Thomas Lehmen. It calls for three teams to perform a set of tasks three times before the teams come together on stage. The guidelines and rules, while inspiring a freedom in interpretation, must be followed precisely otherwise chaos unfolds on stage when the three teams come together.

### Getting started

Two Western Australian choreographers behind the project, Sete Tele and Rachel Ogle had previously worked with groups of dancers with Down Syndrome through projects with Disability in the Arts Disadvantage in the Arts WA (DADAA).



Photo courtesy of STRUT Dance

“We still had to find the number three team, explains Ms Michelet, “and that’s where we came up with the adaptation – proposing that one of the three versions be performed by the dancers with disabilities that Sete and Rachel had previous experience working with.

“It’s very clear that this would never have happened if Rachel and Sete hadn’t had an opportunity to do all these workshops with DADAA and gotten to know the dancers,” Ms Michelet says, “and also to have had an opportunity to make a selection from the dancers that they knew they could work with. They chose the dancers with the knowledge that they would be better equipped to do this project. In the end it was a rough learning curve for them because they were pushed straight into every day rehearsals for five weeks and then on stage so the achievements were massive.”

An inclusive program had never been attempted at STRUT, mainly due to the company’s structure.

“STRUT is about professional dancing so our members are professional dancers and choreographers and that’s where the project was very challenging for us. For the first time we were taking on amateur dancers and pushing them to do what is required from a professional dancer and in the end I think they did very well.

“I think the work DADAA is doing is fantastic because it allows those workshops to take place, which then allows the leaders of those dance workshops to create their own projects. The whole challenge is the sustainability of the project,” explains Ms Michelet.

One of the dancers Sete and Rachel had worked with at DADAA and drew into the **Schreibstück** performance was 26-year-old Virginia Calabrese. Her mother Lynn Churchill says the support Virginia experienced and the benefits of dance for people with Down Syndrome were incredible.

“Sete and Rachel are just amazing people,” Ms Churchill says. “They have a history with DADAA where the dancers are given a lot of opportunities for development. In one instance one girl had a stroke and she kind of communicated through dance for a long time. Another fellow who was actually in this performance, was almost unable to move at first and now he’s the star of the show. It’s taken about 10 years of dancing with Sete and Rachel, so they’re incredibly supportive.”

## Flexible approach

While the concept of **Schreibstück** was flexible, the performance needed just a little adaptation to fit with the dancers’ ability.

“We actually asked Thomas Lehman, the author of the book, if he would agree to the slight changes we needed to make in order to allow the dancers to come on stage,” Ms Michelet says. “It was also a discussion we needed to have with the choreographer, and he was delighted that we were doing it because I think it had gone from Europe to Asia and to Australia and ours was the only version with dancers with disabilities. It worked. It was fantastic because the context was professional so the rules were the same as the other teams.”

The rehearsals were held daily over five weeks, as is the demands of a professional dancer.

“What we realised however was when the other teams had five weeks we should have allowed for more with this team, just because of the reality of rehearsing for a full day – they could not do that. We should have made it half a day. We recognised the abilities of the dancers, which were different from the other professional dancers such as how long they can remain having attention going through the artistic process. I think there are two things; obviously one was to do with the fact they have Down Syndrome, but it was also to do with the fact that they had little ongoing professional training,” says Ms Michelet.

“I think it triggered a lot of discussion about what comes with the fact they have Down Syndrome and what comes from not being an ongoing trained dancer, with less opportunities to come to a regular class. I think it also gave us an idea of the obstacles

that are very true for any independent dancer, but possibly 10 times more for a dancer that has Down Syndrome.”

Other unexpected demands STRUT encountered involved the additional support that can sometimes be asked of not only those involved directly in the project but others who may be present. As was the case with one of Strut’s regular professional dancers, who was called upon to help while he was rehearsing his own material.

“We are lucky in a way that one of our dancers, who was not involved with this project, had actually been working with people with Down Syndrome and knew some of the dancers. At the time of the project he was working on a dance theatre project and he said he had the difficult situation of making himself available if the **Schreibstück** choreographers were slightly late or if they were taking care of another dancer,” Ms Michelet explains.



Photo courtesy of STRUT Dance

**“It was the additional support that we hadn’t planned for. Something more than just being there as a choreographer was required – it’s that emotional support.”**

## Positive progress

While the demands of working at the level of a professional dancer posed problems for some of the dancers with disabilities, there were many benefits for the dancers, least of all an increase in confidence.

“At the time Virginia was unbelievably unwell,” Ms Churchill explains. “We don’t actually know what happened. She’s normally a very active, socially engaged, lively person but she had about a year in almost a comatose state. Her whole body shut down and **Schreibstück** was about in the middle of it. For Virginia it was a big deal, we had to cut down on her other activities so she had the energy for doing that.

“She had a lot of behavioural problems at the time, obsessive compulsive things like putting her hands in the air and walking on her toes, completely unusual. She’s usually not like that. Sete and Rachel got her down off her toes and working in collaboration with the other dancers.”

Audience reaction to the performances was positive, with the interpretation of Lehman’s tasks and rules taking on new depth with these dancers.

**“It was very interesting because they had never seen dancers with disability in such context where the focus was not on the disability,” Ms Michelet says. “So it was like watching another interpretation.”**



Photo courtesy of STRUT Dance

“The way you looked at it was, ‘well, let’s see how they have completed the task,’ and see the disability in the quality of its interpretation and difference. The appreciation was that difference through the achievement.

“Obviously the audience couldn’t see the progress night after night, but for those few who came twice – the parents came a few times so they could definitely see progress. For example, there was a task where one of the dancers had to say a text and each night the text was said louder with more confidence to a point where it became a real dialogue and everyone was really comfortable and enjoying the performance,” recalls Ms Michelet.

## Lessons learned

STRUT is considering the possibility of following up with another project. Agnes

Michelet has several ideas that would aid the next project including making sure the rehearsals have additional support people.

Also the structure of the pilot project meant that much more time was demanded from STRUT and the choreographers in regards to reporting and training.

“There were many meetings and many times where we were invited to go to conferences (to talk about our experiences), but because it’s not our core business and we are a very small business, time is so restricted for all of us that we did keep thinking that we didn’t have the time to spend on the research part of the project. If we were commissioning a piece from the choreographers for another project like this, we would ask for them to be paid for the preparation time, which is bigger than in other projects,” Ms Michelet says.



Photo courtesy of STRUT Dance

## Outline of project

To progress dancers with Down Syndrome into a professional dance environment.

## Partners

**STRUT Dance** offers support to independent dance artists so they can create and produce their own work. The flexibility of artistic direction and breadth of membership allows STRUT to support emerging and established artists who work across a range of contemporary dance practices.

## Outcome

Four dancers with disabilities performed in the Australian premiere production of Thomas Lehmen’s **Schreibstück**. One of the dancers, Maria Lisa Hill was included as part of Ausdance’s Dance Dialect program in November 2009.

Choreographer Sete Tele presented a duet with another of the **Schreibstück** dancers David Guhl in July 2008 at PICA as part of Putting on an Act, which was reviewed very positively as a highlight of the program.

# Case Study 8

## Weaving inclusion into the community

### **Mundaring Arts Centre in partnership with Disability in the Arts, Disadvantage in the Arts WA (DADAA) and the Hills Community Support Group.**

Mundaring Arts Centre has been connected with DADAA since 2006, working on a one-year program designed to promote inclusion and increase access to their services. When participants from the Hills Community Support Group started attending the art workshops, the three organisations set about stabilising their relationship for future projects.

While not part of the DAII Pilot Project, the Mundaring Arts Centre has echoed the DAII model by firstly conducting a disability audit, partnering with disability services organisations and then introducing a program to promote inclusion.

Director of Mundaring Arts Centre Jenny Haynes, along with local artist and workshop assistant Anne Williams, reflect on the work they have been involved in over the last three years.

.....

Due to the success of the previous partnerships with Hills Community Support Group and DADAA, the Mundaring Arts Centre identified a need for a more inclusive approach to their workshops. The three project partners set about cementing their relationships, commissioned an accessibility audit, and outlined a series of inclusive workshops named 'Convergence'.

The Mundaring Arts Centre and Hills Community Support Group had developed a productive working relationship over the past 25 years, working in a sporadic nature

from project to project. Recent arts projects with DADAA enabled the Arts Centre to strengthen this relationship and further the two organisations' commitment to providing recreational and arts experiences for people with severe difficulties.

"When the projects were over, DADAA assisted us in an advisory capacity, strengthening existing relationships and internal procedures," explains Ms Haynes.

Techniques employed by DADAA were integrated into the Mundaring Arts Centre's existing workshop structure refining procedures, artist training and the scope of programs offered, making the Arts Centre's entire program more inclusive to people with significant needs.

"The changes were more than simply wheelchair access to the Centre," says Ms Haynes. "An audit of all the barriers to access was also completed to see what needed to be done to make the Art Centre's Gallery Gift Shop and public programs more inclusive."

### **Valuable training**

Before the changes were implemented through the Convergence Project, the Arts Centre had encountered some behavioural issues and difficulty working with people with severe disabilities in the normal workshop structure.

"To improve the skills offered and the atmosphere created in the workshops the Convergence partners set up training workshops for the presenting artists, generating a large pool of skilled workers to call upon," recalls Ms Haynes.

The training revolved around sharing the information and expertise from all three organisations and structuring a year long program of six-week workshops in all arts mediums. The artists adapted their approaches to lesson plans to ensure they provided a broad range of activities for all skill levels.

The six-week workshops were led by a fully trained arts worker working in partnership with a mentored arts worker. This enabled the sharing of ideas, creating a larger group of skilled workers and provided more people to assist participants.

“The people that had more severe needs also came with their own support workers, providing an opportunity for Hills Community Support Group’s carers to learn new ways of engaging their participants and create new artworks of their own”, says Ms Haynes.



Photo courtesy of Mundaring Arts Centre

Support workers commented that the project helped them to see themselves as individual artists working alongside the person they were caring for. They were encouraged to use these skills after the completion of the project.

## Community awareness

The Convergence Project was promoted to all members of the community, explaining that the focus was to provide accessible workshops for people with disabilities but also to encourage participation from all ages and skill levels.

**“The way it was advertised said, ‘this is for everyone in our community’, but it is specifically tailored for people with disabilities’, so the people who enrolled knew that when they walked into the room there was going to be a whole range of ages and abilities,” Ms Haynes explains. “Because of that, we attracted people who were really open and welcoming.”**

Due to previous experiences where workshops with diverse groups could be confronting for some of the participants, the Arts Centre recognised it was important to be sensitive to people’s expectations at the point of enrolment.

“The Convergence enrolment forms were carefully constructed to ensure all participants’ needs were met and that workshop artists were fully aware of the experience and preferred methods of learning of all people enrolling,” says Ms Haynes.

## Tailored program

From the organiser's perspective, some familiarity with the participants with disabilities from previous projects with the Hills Community Support Group, assisted in constructing programs which were tailored to the skills of individuals.

"There are lots of things you need to be aware of when working with people who have severe needs. For example, the carer can have a tendency to jump in and do the project themselves," explains Ms Haynes.

"During the Convergence workshops the carers were there as participants, so they thought of themselves as an artist, and the person they're working with as an artist. If the person needs help, the carer is there to support them, but mostly to leave them alone and let them create."

In several cases the tutors in the workshops had to modify their approach in order to instruct the participants more than leave them to explore themselves. It was found that participants with autism required more of a structured learning environment.

Artist Anne Williams, an assistant in the weaving classes, explains that the inclusive nature of the workshops worked well.

"I don't like the word 'inclusive' much, but I think it applies because we had a mixed group, but everyone seemed to fit in," Ms Williams says.

"The other thing we would do was say to carers, 'you're not just here to sit back; you're here to do things as well.' We found that several of the carers worked on their own projects with members of the class and thoroughly enjoyed it.



Photo courtesy of Mundaring Arts Centre

**“We had a wonderful man and his carer who were both really keen participants, side by side. If you came into the group you wouldn't have been able to identify who was the carer. They were just two people working on their own creative thing and I thought that was very valuable to see.”**

The project launched with an exhibition of paintings by members from the Hills Community Support Group, inviting the public to view the range of artworks created with an artist in residence held at the Pinewood Centre in Maida Vale.

A further two exhibitions were held as part of the Convergence project to allow the public and participants to see the broad range of work created throughout the year.

“It was very rewarding to see how many people came to the opening as some of the participants have a fear of crowds. To allow family and friends the opportunity to view the works properly we had an early showing for the participants at six o’clock with the main exhibition opening the same night at 7.30pm,” Ms Haynes says. “We had anticipated that after the speeches many participants may leave as openings can attract around 150 people, but many of the participants stayed on until 11pm enjoying the live music and wonderful atmosphere.”

## Ongoing results

As a result of this project the Mundaring Arts Centre’s workshop structure will remain

accessible and new workshops are planned to continue building on the relationships between the organisations, participants, and artists, pending funding.

“We are hoping for funding support to enable a steady three-year transition into our core program. One of the limitations of the project is that it is free for the community and it requires two arts workers to provide assistance for ten to fifteen people, so it is very cost exhaustive,” explains Ms Haynes.

For Anne Williams and the weaving workshops, the relationships and friendships forged through finding what the participants have in common – including brushes with cancer and bushfires – has meant that the group has continued to meet.



Photo courtesy of Mundaring Arts Centre

“Joyce Tasma, (who worked as the primary artist with Anne) continued to invite participants into her own home to create woven works and share stories,” Ms Williams says. “People who were in that workshop came along and we brought our own stuff to do. We brought something nice to eat and it became a very warm social occasion.”



Photos courtesy of Mundaring Arts Centre

## Outline of project

Increased awareness and access to Mundaring Arts Centre and its venues. Strengthening networks between local organisations, inclusive workshops and increased training for tutors.

## Partners

**Mundaring Arts Centre** champions local artists and crafts people by promoting and exhibiting their work, fostering and advocating their inclusion in activities and cultural development in the Mundaring Shire and the eastern metropolitan region of Western Australia.

**Disability in the Arts, Disadvantage in the Arts WA (DADDA)** is a not-for-profit community cultural development organisation, which has been a catalyst for the development of an inclusive approach to the arts and culture of Western Australia for more than ten years. Their focus is on creating opportunities and significant beneficial social change with people who have a disability and / or mental health issue.

**Hills Community Support Group** is a charitable organisation, which provides services to youth at risk, frail older people, people with disabilities and carers.

## Outcomes

The project has created a more accessible Arts Centre and venues due to the accessibility audit.

Inclusive exhibitions were held at the Mundaring Arts Centre in April and May 2009.

# Case Study 9

## Integrating dancers of all abilities

### Ausdance in partnership with Disability in the Arts Disadvantage in the Arts WA (DADAA) and the Mandurah Disabled Support & Recreational Respite Inc.

Ausdance, a national voice for dance in Australia, has a large and inclusive dream for the dance sector, but until the Australian Youth Dance Festival (AYDF) took place in Mandurah in April 2009, they did not realise to what extent they would be able to integrate dancers with disabilities.

As part of the festival, Ausdance and DADAA formed a partnership to commission a new dance theatre work to be developed by Daniel Daw and Jacob Lehrer, with the intention of integrating dancers with disabilities with able-bodied dancers. The work was included into the AYDF performance showcase at the Mandurah Performing Arts Centre.

.....

Claudia Alessi, Artistic Director of the AYDF 2009, had a vision to build upon AYDF's previous work with people with disabilities.

### The festival

"The last AYDF, held two years ago in Horsham, Victoria, had worked with people with disabilities. Restless Dance Company (a professional dance theatre company from Adelaide who predominantly works with young people with intellectual disabilities) had participated in the festival," explains Ms Alessi.

"This was something I wanted to develop upon the last festival, to not just have a small amount of representation, but to have a feeling of inclusion throughout the festival. So I was looking at it being as inclusive as possible and the festival not just being open to the usual group of young people who are from the city or large regional centres who



Photo courtesy of Ausdance

always get to travel to these amazing events. It was born out of the desire for inclusion.”

The DAII Pilot Program required the arts organisation to partner up with a disability services organisation with the support of the Department of Culture and the Arts (DCA) and the Disability Services Commission.

“I was mentored along the way by DCA. This was really instrumental in contributing to the development of the partnership,” Ms Alessi says. “At one point I almost threw my hands up and went, ‘this is just too hard, I’m out of my league’ but the Department staff advised, ‘no, work with your partners, it’s all about the partnerships. Work as well as you can with these partners and keep forging forward.

“I think it was a great initiative by DCA to have the foresight to see the possibilities. I don’t think we ever dreamed of where it would go for Ausdance. We didn’t realise just how much we would be able to work with people with disabilities. It went from not knowing or understanding how to work with people with disabilities, to facilitating projects with them.”

## Getting started

Able-bodied dancers were sourced through a massive call out throughout Australia to young people involved in youth dance centres and schools to attend AYDF.

Dancers with disabilities came from a group DADAA had been working with for a number of years. All dancers were aged between 14 and 19 years.

“The people with intellectual disabilities were able to showcase two works: one piece

that was instigated through Daniel Daw and Jacob Lehrer and the other, a work by choreographers Sete Tele and Rachel Ogle, who had previously held successful seasons of two dance theatre works with the DADAA dancers,” says Ms Alessi.

Alessi met Daw a few years prior to the festival and she was astounded by his tenacity and ability as a professional dancer with cerebral palsy.

“Upon having conversations with Daniel and working with DADAA as a partner, I had this idea to bring Daniel to work with able-bodied choreographer, Jacob Lehrer, and for Daniel to direct a work that was specifically made with and for DADAA and that this work be showcased in the public performance at the AYDF,” she explains.

“DADAA produced two fantastic works separately that were performed and showcased on a Tuesday and Thursday evening. Then on Saturday, the participants who had worked tirelessly all week in the workshops were integrated into other performances with the rest of the crew.”

Ausdance also tapped into remote communities through the Michael Leslie Foundation, bringing six young Indigenous people to Perth from the remote Pilbara and Kimberley.

## Positive inclusion

“The AYDF included two public performances and an outdoor free performance where daily workshops led into a massive performance piece where all 160 young people participating in the festival performed,” Ms Alessi says.

**“The whole process was extremely positive, in fact it was the most positive outcome they’d had in the history of the AYDF. This generation of kids were so inclusive of the remote kids from the Indigenous crew and from DADAA – it was quite mind blowing.**

**“I wasn’t nervous, I just didn’t know what to expect, so when the most positive outcome was achieved, I was flabbergasted.”**

One of the quintessential moments for Ausdance was the final evening after-party.

“In the closing of it all, everyone was embracing, exchanging emails and phone numbers,” Ms Alessi recalls. “There were two girls, one who’s an independent living

Down Syndrome girl and the other, one of the youngest Aboriginal girls from the remote Pilbara, who gave each other a hug and exchanged words like, ‘wow I can’t believe we did this together and I can’t believe you move like that - you’re amazing!’ And the other girl would respond, ‘no it’s you who’s amazing’.

“Just that connection of exchanging praise and embracing was a sight to be behold. If it were not for the festival and the DAII Pilot Program we wouldn’t have witnessed that. It’s not very often that it happens, because I don’t feel that either girl would have been exposed to each other otherwise.”

However, the whole project would not have come together without hours of painstaking preparation to ensure that every aspect was considered with inclusion in mind.



Photo courtesy of Ausdance



Photo courtesy of Ausdance

“The most important thing for me was that it was complete inclusion,” Ms Alessi says. “I led a yoga class every morning at 9am and I made sure that the carers were really fastidious at making sure everybody arrived and did what they did to the best of their ability.”

An email sent by one of the parents of the dancers from DADAA highlights the success of the project.

“Thank you for the wonderful support you gave my daughter,” the parent writes. “My family thought the week was superb from beginning to end. The performances were brilliant and the atmosphere was warm and congenial...she tells us she loved her teachers and that the other dancers were friendly, welcoming and inclusive.”

Chris Williams, Manager of Arts Development at DADAA, was also impressed with the results.

“I think the participants were extremely comfortable in the festival, which was good to see,” Mr Williams says. “They weren’t afraid of getting up or dancing with the other dancers – they never felt inadequate at any point in time. I think there was a sense that they were as good as the other dancers, and they didn’t identify their disability as limiting in that situation at all. All of them were extremely confident and they were getting up and talking and dancing when some of the other kids from the AYDF were shying away from doing things.”

“I think the biggest thing was that the young people, who were the able-bodied dancers, were so welcoming of the dancers with disabilities. There wasn't any blocking out of other people or putting them on the sideline. It was really inclusive and that's not something you can plan with so many different personalities,” Mr Williams continues.

## The future

An unexpected outcome as a result of the AYDF was that Daniel Daw, whilst on a world tour with Kate Champion and the reputable Force Majeure Theatre Company, decided to use Perth as his base.

“After the AYDF, Daniel moved to Perth and continued to work with DADAA as well as performing in Dance Dialects, an Ausdance WA project. Daniel created a duet for Dance Dialects for himself and one of the DADAA dancers he first met at the AYDF,” Ms Alessi says. “So it has just gone from strength-to-strength and the project has instigated a lot of fantastic smaller projects that will go on to blossom.”



Photo courtesy of Ausdance

## Outline of project

The Australian Youth Dance Festival (AYDF) wanted to integrate dancers with disabilities with able-bodied dancers in the festival. AYDF targeted teenagers at local schools and TAFE's Access and Participation programs. DADAA dancers with disabilities worked with professional choreographers prior to the festival.

## Partners

**Ausdance** aims to provide leadership and to be a national voice for dance in Australia through promoting awareness and access to dance; providing opportunities for debate, advocacy and policy development; and fostering international links.

**Disability in the Arts, Disadvantage in the Arts WA (DADAA)** is a not-for-profit community cultural development organisation, which has been a catalyst for the development of an inclusive approach to the arts and culture of Western Australia for more than 10 years. Their focus is on creating opportunities and significant beneficial social change with people who have a disability and / or mental health issue.

**Mandurah Disabled Support & Recreational Respite Inc** is a recreational and support service providing approximately two to three hours support per week for up to 25 individuals with disabilities in the Mandurah region.

## Outcomes

Ausdance has instigated another two projects with Daniel Daw including a new work for the 2009 Dance Dialects program. Daniel Daw has moved to Perth permanently in the hope of creating an inclusive dance company and an access dance plan with Ausdance WA.



Photographer Janusz Strzelecki



Photographer Janusz Strzelecki

# Acknowledgements

The **Disability and the Arts Inclusion Initiative** is the result of a cross-government collaborative partnership between the **Department of Culture and the Arts** and the **Disability Services Commission** and is unique in Australia.

## Enquiries

### **Department of Culture and the Arts**

**Telephone:** (08) 9224 7300

**Freecall:** 1800 199 090 (regional callers only)

**Fax:** (08) 9224 7301

**[www.dca.wa.gov.au](http://www.dca.wa.gov.au)**

People who are deaf or have a hearing impairment can use the teletypewriter (TTY) by calling the National Relay Service 13 36 77 or 1800 555 677 (Freecall, regional callers only)

This publication is available in CD format. Please contact the Department of Culture and the Arts if you would like to obtain a CD.

It is also available as an accessibility tagged PDF and in large font for print on our website.

For information on interpreting assistance in languages other than English phone the Translating and Interpreting Service on 13 14 50, during business hours, 9am – 5pm Monday to Friday.

### **Disability Services Commission**

**Telephone:** 9426 9200

**Freecall:** 1800 998 214

**TTY:** 9426 9315

**Fax:** 9226 2306

**[www.disability.wa.gov.au](http://www.disability.wa.gov.au)**



Government of Western Australia  
Department of Culture and the Arts



