

**Brisbane Access and Inclusion Plan
Report on Engagement Activities**

Event	Blue Skies Initiative – conversation with participants in the Blue Skies monthly meeting
Date	27 May 2011
Time	10 am – 12:30 pm
Venue	NDS office
Officers	Gerard Dowling, Vanessa Fabre, Ingrid Martonova
Description of process	<p>Due to the small number of participants, the session was managed as one conversation circle involving all participants (i.e. no small group work). To set the stage for a focussed discussion around access and inclusion issues affecting people living and visiting Brisbane, the session opened with an invitation for participants to reflect on an example of either a good or a bad experience with access and/or inclusion in Brisbane, and to relate that as part of the introduction. Following the intro, the facilitator (GD) asked the participants to think about three questions relating to each of the five sections of the plan. These are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What are the key issues that local governments should consider with respect to the accessibility of pedestrian mobility and transport? 2. What are some of the emerging trends and/or opportunities in this area? 3. What are some examples of innovative local government responses to these issues? <p>In the end there was time to examine these three questions only in relation to the first three sections of the plan. To conclude the consultation session, the facilitator asked the group what Council can do to improve attitudes among Brisbane residents and visitors towards people with disabilities.</p>
# and description of participants	<p>11 participants Pauline Pearson –Xavier Children’s Support Network Cheryl Nering – Xavier Children’s Support Network Mark Henley – Spinal Injuries Association Kelli _____ – Sporting Wheelies Thea Summerville – parent/carer for an adult son with high support needs Shelly _____ – Mercy Disability Services John Catania – Blue Skies Shelley Birrell – National Disability Services Lisa _____ – National Disability Services Jane Airen – Muscular Dystrophy Queensland</p>
Issues discussed	See report below.
Follow-up required	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Notes to be sent to Blue Skies.

1 Setting the stage - discussion of access experiences (positive or negative) in Brisbane:

As part of introductions, participants were asked to speak about a positive or negative access/inclusion experience they have had in Brisbane. Responses:

- Pauline from the Xavier Children's Support Network noted that her team appreciates being able to access parks with Liberty Swings in Brisbane. The swings allow children with high support needs to experience play.
- Cheryl, also from the Xavier Children's Support Network, spoke about the difficulties that she and her colleagues experience around managing the toileting needs of older children with high support needs when they are out and about. Lack of appropriate facilities makes it difficult for these children to be taken out for outings, and the support staff often resort to toileting in the van or in a tent, which is far from optimal.
- Mark from the Spinal Injuries Association praised Council for changing the name of the plan from the Access and Equity Plan (as originally announced in September 2010) to the Access and Inclusion Plan, which he sees as a very positive change that highlights the need for more inclusionary practice. He also recounted an experience last year where he heard Cr Geraldine Knapp speak with passion and enthusiasm about Council's access and inclusion initiatives. If this momentum continues, there is great promise for improving accessibility and inclusion in Brisbane.
- Kelli from Sporting Wheelies spoke about the positive changes she has been noticing as a mom of two boys in the accessibility of a range of facilities, parks and open spaces. There has been positive change not only in physical access, but also in attitudinal access. She affirmed the positive message that the name of the Access and Inclusion Plan sends to the rest of the community.
- Thea, mother of a 32-year old son with profound support needs, spoke about her son's dreams of travel, which are difficult to fulfil given his support needs. She was very excited when NDS sent a notice that BCC had installed a Changing Places toilet facility in the CBD, so much so that she travelled down to Brisbane (from the Sunshine Coast) to check it out, and then wrote to Council to express her appreciation for having provided this important facility.
- Shelly from Mercy Disability Services, an organisation that supports people with mobility disability (many of their clients are older individuals who are using wheelchairs or mobility aids), has found that at times footpaths are a safety problem when their clients are going to the city. Swimming pools are also a big issue; their clients love to go swimming, so MDS has to look for pools with appropriate changing facilities.
- John from the Blue Skies team affirmed that the term 'inclusion' is a significant addition to the plan. John explained that he has difficulty with perception of depth, so uneven road surfaces and gutters can be quite difficult. John noted that he has had a few instances where Council has responded quickly to issues that he identified in his local area. He had also written a letter to Council when he learned that the previous LM would be using fines from disability parking infringement to improve access across Brisbane, and congratulated him on this decision.
- Shelley from National Disability Services spoke about the difficulty that her team had in getting a gentleman who uses a wheelchair to go to a sporting event at the Gabba.
- Lisa from National Disability Services has background in working with people who

have complex behavioural issues, where physical barriers may not be as much a challenge as attitudinal barriers. Lisa noted that many buildings are not designed to address the needs of people with sensory difficulties.

2 Pedestrian mobility and transport:

Participants were asked three questions about pedestrian mobility and transport, which is the first section of the draft plan. The same three questions were posed in later sessions focusing on other sections of the draft plan.

- What are the key issues that local governments should consider with respect to the accessibility of pedestrian mobility and transport?
- What are some of the emerging trends and/or opportunities in this area?
- What are some examples of innovative local government responses to these issues?

Key issues for local government

- Ramp is not always a ramp – although there may be a ramp at a pedestrian crossing, getting through lights in a specific time at a 45 degree angle is very challenging. When designing kerb ramps Council should seek advice from people who use wheelchairs.
- At the front of the NDS office is a wheelchair/disability drop-off area, but if the drop-off area is full, a taxi has no choice but to pull up further up the rank, and passengers have to exit the cab by going out onto the road, which puts them at significant risk. This is an issue in many public complexes, where there is insufficient space for disability access drop-off.
- Light polls in the middle of footpaths in many older suburbs make it difficult for a wheelchair or a pram to fit onto the footpath.
- Consistency of surface material and maintenance are two key issues for Council to consider in planning and delivering footpaths. Small laneways can be difficult to access because there are inconsistencies from one footpath to the next (in terms of surface cover). This is a particular challenge for people in mobility aids, people with low vision, and people who have difficulties with depth perception. Depth perception is a big issue for people with intellectual disabilities, many of whom can't perceive depth or colour change, and find variations in surfaces or colour (from one sidewalk to another or one gutter to another) to be a barrier in their ability to move about the city. This can result in behavioural issues, which lead to exclusion.
- Pavers as a footpath covering are an issue for people with spinal injuries who can experience spasms from the continuous shaking brought on by pavers (e.g. Queen Street Mall and other areas in the city are problematic due to pavers).
- Cars that park in driveways and block footpaths are a big issue for footpath usage.
- The 24-hour booking system for wheelchair accessible buses is not reliable. Participants have heard reports from people who have booked a bus using this service but the wheelchair access bus didn't turn up.
- More education for people who work in public transport (i.e. bus drivers) on access-friendly customer service would be helpful.
- One participant noted that the Red Cross Transport Access Project is a great alternative to the shortcomings of the public transport system as it is flexible and individually tailored to meet one's needs.

- When consulting with the community on access barriers you are relying on people coming forward, and consequently you end up with one-sided or one-issue responses from those who are willing to speak up. This results in standards or rules that are responsive to the needs of those who are able to speak up, rather than the needs of the whole community.
- The above point can be exemplified through the challenge of finding suitable holiday accommodation for people with high support needs. In setting out guidelines for accessible holiday accommodation, Australian Standards looked at the needs of people in wheelchairs who can attend to their needs. They did not look at challenges experienced by people who have higher support needs, and who usually cannot advocate for themselves. As a result, it's nearly impossible to find suitable holiday accommodation for individuals who have high support needs.
- In relation to the point above, a question was raised whether Council has a simple form (or format) through which one can send a request to address a problem, rather than having to send a formal letter. A formal letter can be a barrier for people who can't communicate easily; a simple form/format might address that barrier.
- Question was raised whether Council has input into the maxicab service, because Xavier Children's Support Network has had problems with maxicab drivers about the way in which they want to secure children in Xavier's care. Council staff clarified that all taxis fall under the responsibility of the Queensland Government, and that we would feed this information to them as part of the consultation process feedback loop.

Emerging trends/opportunities

- Participant reported witnessing a young man having an epileptic seizure on the train and the staff on the train handling the situation really well (it was obvious they had good training). It would be good if Council's employees could offer similar responses when issues arise, in particular bus drivers.
- This consultation process provides an opportunity for Council to partner with organisations that are in a position to inform, guide and educate Council on ways to improve access.
- The fact that Council is looking at the needs of seniors as well as what we traditionally see as people with access barriers (i.e. people with disabilities) presents good opportunities.

Innovative local government responses

None noted.

3 Planning, development and infrastructure

Key issues for local government

- Consistency of design is very critical – taking into account some of the more complex issues that people with disabilities experience – colour, shape and surfaces.
- Building on the example of the Racecourse Precinct Development process (provided by Vanessa Fabre from BCC), make sure that developers are aware of the design features that will make places more inclusive and accessible.

- Make sure that new buildings (like office spaces in South Brisbane) are more universally designed – e.g. there might be an accessible toilet in the building (one), but the other toilets may be very small, excluding a large segment of the population. Don't just have one accessible toilet, make sure that your 'generic' toilets 'tick' the requirements of accessibility.
- Make sure that the accessible toilet is not far away from the main entry elevator (or ramp from car park).
- Size of lifts is a big issue in many buildings for persons who have large wheelchairs and for the support workers who assist them.
- Changing tables in public toilets should be of the kind that hinges along the narrower part of the changing table, allowing parents to change their children head-on rather than from the side (i.e. the changing table should be attached in a way that allows parents to face their children while changing them).
- Appropriate fire evacuation options are needed in many public buildings – NDS have asked for a liftable chair to be procured to get someone down the stairs when an elevator is shut down during an emergency, but that's still not sorted out.
- Having more people with disabilities involved in the design process through consultation would be a big step towards achieving greater accessibility through the planning process.

Emerging trends/opportunities

- Considering available data about population ageing and the links between disability prevalence and age, public service providers need to be forward thinking about sizes of lifts, car parking set-down areas, sizes of toilets, and the general relevance of buildings for the changing needs of future populations.
- There is an opportunity for Council to highlight good examples of access and inclusion through an annual awards program. This would help raise awareness about access needs and reward best practice examples.

Innovative local government responses

None noted.

4 Public buildings, venues and outdoor spaces

Key issues for local government

- Liberty Swings are great but they are often set apart from the area where other children are playing. They provide for the safety considerations of children with high support needs, but not for inclusion. Also, accessing Liberty Swings is difficult, especially for visitors, as the key for the swings is available only during business hours, and usually in a different location.
- Pool fencing should be adequate for protecting Liberty Swings (presumably from small children), rather than the high fencing used in many places.
- Adults with sensory disabilities are looking for recreation opportunities in parks and open spaces where there is the right combination of stimulus, people and space, and where their need for a quiet area can be met when things don't go well.

- Elevated perfumed gardens would be very nice so that people in wheelchairs are able to get close to the plants.
- One of the organisations represented at the consultation session doesn't use Council pools because they have had too many difficulties in the past. When their organisation tried to take a group of young people with incontinence issues to the Jindalee Pool, they were told that if any of their clients had an accident then the organisation would be responsible for the cost of emptying the pool and the loss of the facility for the two days it would require to clean the pool.

Emerging trends/opportunities

- Nabethon Special School at Wooloongabba has an example of a beautiful sensory play activity for children with sensory disabilities – it would be great to see Council consulting with a group that has a lot of experience in developing a space that caters to the needs of high support children while being inclusive of all children by its very design.

Innovative local government responses

None noted.

5 Vibrant, informed and caring communities

In response to a question raised by Mark Henley at the start of the consultation session on whether section 5.3. of the plan (Communicating and doing business with us) is intended to include initiatives to influence the attitudes of the wider community towards people with disabilities (the answer being 'not at the moment'), Gerard Dowling concluded the consultation session by asking participations the question: "What can Council do to improve attitudes in the city of Brisbane?"

The participants' responses include:

- Encourage community members to engage with people with disabilities in their community (as neighbours) to begin breaking down barriers.
- Council's promotional materials (in print and on the web) should show images that promote the notion that Council services/initiatives are for everyone -> images are a powerful tool for challenging attitudes.
- Invite people with disability to talk to Council employees on particular issues to help them better understand the experience of people with disabilities in the use of their particular service – very powerful technique to connect Council officers with the experiences of their service users.
- Social Inclusion and Awareness Week – block/neighbourhood parties to encourage connections among neighbours – this will break down isolation and promote community safety – Neighbourhood Watch can be linked into this as well.
- When Council officers brought up the example of the annual Neighbour Day celebration (in response to the above point), it became clear that no one in the room was aware of this initiative. This led to recommendations that Neighbour Day events be promoted through morning programs on radio/TV as well as stronger partnerships with community organisations, which could help spread the information about this initiative (this is leading by example by being a good organisational neighbour).

- Showcase/celebrate overall diversity, not just people with disabilities.
- There is a need to improve accessibility in the hospitality industry, especially as there are different standards of what accessible accommodation or accessible facilities means to different individuals with disabilities. Perhaps a star rating for accessibility could help identify which hospitality provider is offering accommodation that meets the needs of high support needs individuals, and drive home the point that different types of disability require different access considerations in facilities and accommodation.
- Following on the above point, Council could help educate service providers (in particular the hospitality industry) about the diversity of needs of people with disabilities.
- Some venues/service providers (especially entertainment venues) prohibit people from bringing their food, which limits people who have specific dietary requirements. Related to the previous two points, Council could help service providers understand that these types of requirements are discriminatory.
- Financial barriers are an issue for people with disabilities, as accessible services (like accommodation) often cost more than non-accessible services. Financial considerations are also relevant to Brisbane's swimming pools; some pools allow carers to enter free of charge, while other pools require that carers pay, a burden that is passed on to the person with a disability who is requiring the carer's support for visiting a swimming pool. The new Qld Government Carer's Card is for family carers only, not for paid carers. This seems absurd, as paid carers are not there to use the facility, but to assist their paying client in doing so. Vanessa Fabre from BCC responded to this point by noting that it would be very helpful if this group could help Council come up with guidelines around access for carers that we could share with our pool operators.
- Council could be more inclusive in its Active and Healthy programs by providing adjustment tools/equipment to help more people participate in recreational activities (e.g. lower benches or equipment). Also, Council should consult with special schools on the type of play equipment to be placed in all abilities play spaces.
- Some people with disabilities find it difficult to access life skills programs like cooking, budgeting, etc. As a way to help develop communities, Council could fund/support 'assisted communal facilities' where people with disabilities can learn cooking and other lifestyle skills with the support of on-site staff and with access to assisted cooking devices.