

Accessibility Action Plan 2020-23



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NEW SOUTH WALES



Front and inside cover: Gabby Vassallo, State Library visitor, Mitchell Galleries, photo: Joy Lai

What is this Accessibility Action Plan about?

In July 2019 the Library released its Strategic Plan for 2019–23. The overarching theme of the plan, *Inside Out*, is to fully face and serve our community. Considering that 16.9% of people in New South Wales encounter disability in their lives,¹ it is abundantly clear that we can only achieve this aim if accessibility is considered in everything we do. When people visit the Library, either in person or online, we would like them to be as unaware of disability as possible.

Despite every good intention, sweet words will only ever remain on a page unless a clear, concise and accountable plan is developed to realise them. Rather than a traditional top-down approach, where senior management formulates actions and filters them down to operational staff, this plan was developed from the ground up. We reviewed our previous *Disability Inclusion Action Plan 2016–19* to look at our successes and the areas where we still need to improve. We then consulted with readers, visitors and library staff to gather insights about the improvements that will make a tangible difference to people who use the Library.

The result is an Accessibility Action Plan that is composed of real, achievable actions. It steers clear of any box-ticking exercise and stands as a genuine attempt to bring Library staff and the public together to make the Library a place of belonging. Of course there will be challenges — not least of all occupying the oldest library building in Australia. However, we seek to work with and overcome these challenges as best we can, and to continue learning along the way.

John Vallance
State Librarian



¹ ABS Cat. No 4430.0 - Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Summary of Findings, 2018

What is disability?

The Library views disability in line with the social model which defines it as a result of the ‘...interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinders their full and active participation in society on an equal basis with others’.²

The idea of equal access is at the heart of the Library. We would like everyone, without exception, to benefit from the Library’s collections, services and programs and for people to experience as few barriers as possible.

How does it all fit together?

In the international context, the Library is guided by the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (UNCRPD) which promotes the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities. We partner with the International Federation of Libraries Associations (IFLA) and support their commitment to ensuring libraries worldwide are places which provide safe and usable spaces for people with disability.

Nationally, we align with the National Disability Strategy and more specifically, the *National Arts & Disability Strategy*, which seeks to engage more people with disability to work in and contribute to the cultural and arts sector.

On a state level, we work with the Government under the *Disability Inclusion Act* to help make communities more inclusive and accessible for people with

disability. We partner with our friends and colleagues at other cultural institutions, with whom we have regular meetings, to share accessibility initiatives. This includes the Sydney Opera House, Art Gallery of NSW, Powerhouse Museum, Sydney Living Museums and the Museum of Contemporary Art.

Who are our readers, visitors and staff?

In 2018–19, there were 902,615 in-person visits to the Library and 3,788,031 online visits.³

Our readers and visitors reflect the broadest spectrum of society and include researchers, school students, people who are socially disadvantaged, generous benefactors and travellers. 11.2% of our readers and visitors experience disability.⁴

Our Library staff are similarly diverse and present a variety of cultural, professional and personal backgrounds. 5.1% of our staff members identify as experiencing disability.⁵

² *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*

³ State Library of NSW Annual Report, 2018–19

⁴ State Library of NSW User & Community Surveys, 2018

⁵ Public Service Commission – Workforce Profile Report, 2018

What did we learn?

Consultations with our readers, visitors and staff through small group discussions, interviews and surveys provided valuable feedback on how we can improve. We also encouraged participation via email, social media and the Library's website.

People love our buildings and facilities but getting to the Library can be a challenge without a drop-off zone or easy parking. Getting around the place can be confusing. We realised that we weren't doing enough to let people know what services and support are available — both internally for our staff and externally for members of the public.

We can do more to cater for people who are deaf and/or hard of hearing by ensuring hearing loops are in all event spaces, that people always use microphones for events, and that announcements made over the Library's PA system are loud, slow and clear.

Our staff culture can be more supportive to staff with disability, both in terms of improving attitudes and behaviours, and in facilitating work arrangements that enable people to be at their best.

William Hill-Smith — Library visitor



William has been visiting the Library since 2017 and comes twice a week to work for the entire day. As is evident in the photograph, he is an avid fan of V8 supercars racing and in partnership with his mother Noelle, and friend and carer Sam, William produces a website blog, Facebook page and YouTube channel to share his passion with other V8 supercar fans. The content that William develops includes journalistic reviews, statistical information on races, video content including interviews with the drivers and race personnel. All three platforms have a large subscriber base and continue to grow in popularity.

The Library is suitable for William because there is a dedicated study room in the Governor Marie Bashir Reading Room which has a height-adjustable desk. Adjusting the height of the table allows for a wheelchair to be moved right up to the desk, enabling computer use. The room is prioritised for

William in the Governor Marie Bashir Reading Room, photo: Joy Lai

people who require this desk, so William is almost always able to reserve it.

For his lunchbreak, William moves upstairs to Cafe Trim where there is a similar high table that is prioritised for use by people who need it. Accessible toilets are available near the cafe on Ground Floor and also on LG1 of the Governor Marie Bashir Reading Room.

As a regular user of the Library, William has come to know many of our staff and provides suggestions about how we can improve his experience. One barrier that William has encountered is that other people using the Study Room move the accessible table around, preventing him from accessing the table as he normally does. William has provided feedback to the Library including the suggestion of a second higher table in Cafe Trim and a data projector in the study room.

Working with a regular user of the Library, such as William, to make improvements is a great example of what the Library hopes to continue doing – to support people to pursue their passions and interests and remove any barriers that are in the way.

Joyce Azzopardi – staff member

In October 2001, Joyce began working at the Library in the Public Library Services branch, NSW.net Services team.


Around three years ago Joyce suddenly became ill, resulting in an extended hospital stay. The lack of movement for such a long time created severe lower limb contractures resulting in her being unable to stand or walk. She was provided with an electric wheelchair upon her departure from hospital after 12 months. Throughout her stay in hospital, her work colleagues kept in touch and provided much-needed support.

Joyce was absent from work for two years. She decided to return to work in February 2019. In consultation with HR, Joyce's first month back at work was staggered to ease her back into the workforce. She found the first two weeks quite challenging as many work processes had changed in the time she was away, however, by the end of the month things normalised. She progressed to working full time and has been doing so ever since. The Library assisted with Joyce's return to work by ensuring wheelchair access was available. Automatic entry doors into office areas were installed and kitchen facilities were altered so that they were within reach.

Joyce is a very independent person who makes the most out of the public transport system to travel to and from work and on personal trips. When travelling to and from work, she has found that using a wheelchair is quite a sociable way for strangers to connect, as many people are curious to find out her story. On the whole, colleagues have been accepting of Joyce's situation, and it has provided an opportunity for the Library to make staff work areas and facilities more accessible not only for Joyce, but also for other existing and future staff members.

What have we done already?

In 2016 the Library launched its first Disability Inclusion Action Plan which focused on providing accessible and inclusive collections and services. The following actions were achieved between 2016 and 2019:

- An Accessibility Advisory Committee was established, with members who are highly experienced in the area of access and inclusion and bring personal experience of living with disability. The group has provided invaluable feedback on the Library's building works, website, feedback process and the development of this plan.
 - Three Visitor Services Officers were employed to greet people as they enter our Macquarie St foyer and Mitchell vestibule. These friendly faces provide visitors with directions, describe our services and circulate feedback.
 - The Library's heritage collection was augmented with a series of oral history interviews of people with disability conducted by Louise Darmody.
 - Accessibility was prioritised in the design of the new Mitchell Galleries, which included two new accessible lifts and fully accessible bathrooms.
 - Our new catalogue interface was developed based on user experiences, including those of people with disability, and complies with Level AA Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG).
 - Training entitled *Facilitating access for clients with a disability* was delivered to all staff and advanced training for frontline staff and security officers.
 - An updated Accessibility Guide and improved signage has made it easier for visitors to find their way around the Library.
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- For people who use a wheelchair, the visitor experience in our Reading Rooms and cafe was improved by installing tall tables and height-adjustable desks.
 - New hearing loops and other assistive technology including large print keyboards were installed.
 - Special events were made more accessible with captioning and Auslan interpreters.
 - Our *Guide for applying for roles* publication was updated to provide information on accessibility when working at the Library.
 - A Family Room was built in the Mitchell building, offering a quiet space for families and those who require a place with less stimulation.

Darren Blumberg, State Library Volunteer,
in Macquarie St foyer, photo: Taryn Ellis

What are we going to do?

Building on our 2016–19 Disability Inclusion Action Plan, this section outlines the concrete actions which the Library is committing to for the period of 2020–23.

These actions are divided into four key focus areas which align with the NSW Disability Inclusion Plan:

- developing positive community attitudes and behaviours
- creating liveable communities
- supporting access to meaningful employment
- improving access to mainstream services through better systems and processes

Behind this action list is an Operational Plan which notes the timeline, progress markers and staff members responsible for each action.

The quotes used in this section all come from Library readers, visitors and staff who informed the development of this plan.

Attitudes and behaviours

Before making any tangible changes, it is important that our staff, readers and visitors understand the profound benefits of removing barriers that prevent people from accessing our services and facilities. We hope to fully realise the importance of our strategic aim to be a library where you don't need to fit in to belong.

'Libraries are one of the most important free to all spaces in our community. One of the few. Only best practice for the people with disability is good enough here in the State's premier library.'

'The Library is in general a beautiful and inclusive environment, with potential to be a leader in accessibility as well.'



'The Library should be informed by the lived experience of people with disabilities.'

'We need less judgement around staff who have disability.'

KEY ACTIONS

- Continue to provide Disability Awareness training to all staff and advanced training for frontline staff.
- Promote the presence of the Accessibility Advisory Committee throughout the Library.
- Feature improvements in accessibility and inclusion via social media and other digital channels.
- Document and promote best practice in accessibility in NSW public libraries.
- Work with Accessibility Advisory Committee to develop a communication campaign regarding disability inclusion.

State Library of NSW Accessibility Advisory Committee, L to R, Mr Timothy Hart, Mr Mark Tonga, Mr Mark Kunach, Dr Naomi Malone, Mr Michael Carney (Library chair), Dr Gaele Sobott, Dr Breda Carty, photo: Joy Lai

- Develop a photo library which represents the diversity of the community including people with disability for use across print and digital channels.
- Partner with other cultural institutions to develop shared initiatives for greater engagement with people with disability.

Liveable communities

Liveable communities refer to physical spaces and services that everyone can access. Having a Library site that dates back to 1910 means that we continually face challenges to provide entrances and pathways which are accessible to all. For the period of this plan we have a few major initiatives planned which aim to address these challenges.

‘I would love to be able to say to people that our Library is one of the most accessible places to visit in the CBD.’

‘No safe drop-off zone for people visiting the Library is a real barrier.’

‘The incline at the entry into the Macquarie St building is challenging for some people.’

‘The Mitchell building main entry remains an area of concern as is the forecourt accessibility around from Shakespeare to the Macquarie street entry.’

‘It would be great to see a Family History workshop presented with an Auslan Interpreter.’

KEY ACTIONS

Physical spaces and facilities

- As part of the Library’s Compliance, Capacity and Accessibility Master Plan:

- install a permanent accessible lift at the entrance to the Mitchell building
- develop a solution to the sloped entrance from Macquarie Street into the Library
- update built infrastructure in Macquarie St and Mitchell buildings to meet current accessibility standards
- remove the Dalgety Walkway and create an accessible pathway between the Macquarie St and Mitchell buildings.
- Investigate a visitor drop-off zone at the rear of the Library.
- Ensure that accessibility principles are incorporated into building works and renewal projects through engagement of access consultants.
- Communicate special provisions and alternative access routes during capital works projects, building disruptions or lift maintenance.
- Update the Accessibility Guide in print and online, including a new map highlighting accessible routes and facilities.
- Ensure any new signage and wayfinding meets the needs of readers and visitors with disability.
- Investigate easy-to-read and large print options for the Accessibility Guide and other key publications.

Public programs and exhibitions

- Continue to ensure assistance and support is provided as requested for people with disability to attend and participate in Library events and programs.

- Investigate funding opportunities for accessible tours of exhibitions with Auslan interpreters.
- Upgrade the hearing loop in the Gallery Room and install one in the Dixon Room.
- Develop and implement an Accessibility Checklist that sets minimum standards and aspirational goals for planning and design of exhibitions.
- Build in-house capacity for audio description and pilot its use within an exhibition with evaluation by the Library's Accessibility Advisory Committee.
- Build in-house capacity to provide online transcriptions for collection material, such as oral histories and manuscripts, and recordings from Library events.
- Create an exhibition fact sheet resource for frontline staff which includes information on accessibility features and services.
- Continue to purchase large print and talking books for people who are blind or have low vision and distribute through Public Library Network.
- Deliver an introduction to Family History resources with Auslan interpreters and aim to record it to make available online.
- Pilot Library tours including demonstrations of adaptive technology and accessible facilities.
- Investigate partnering with existing mobile apps for wayfinding and guides to exhibitions at the Library.

Employment

In line with the Library's strategic aim to prioritise staff culture, we foster a workplace based on respect, support

and responsibility. This means that people with disability are welcomed and supported to work at the Library. We have a lot to learn from our colleagues and aim to create an environment where people feel comfortable raising anything that might get in the way of them doing their job.

'It is the Library's responsibility to facilitate the staff and provide an environment where the person can perform to the best of his/her capabilities.'

'The Library should aim to become a favoured employer for people with disability.'

'There need to be opportunities for staff to change the way they work, or the type of work they perform.'

'Ask staff what they need or check in with them regularly. I imagine that the costs of disability to the institution are far outweighed by the benefits to staff and their colleagues as well as the community.'

'Provide internships and/or work experience placements for people with disability across the organisation.'

KEY ACTIONS

- Ensure that all staff are aware of available systems and support.
- Continue to identify specific needs for staff with disability and develop solutions or strategies to support them in the workplace.
- Provide all people leaders with information about support and services available for staff with disability.

- Regularly invite staff with disability to provide feedback on services and support.
- Continue to deliver programs and resources that focus on staff mental health awareness and proactive engagement in mental health wellbeing.
- Provide and promote internship opportunities for people with disability.
- Continue to provide Disability Awareness training to all staff and advanced training for frontline staff.
- Develop a policy on 'Reasonable Adjustment' and make changes to the work environment that allow people with disability to work safely and productively.
- Develop strategies to support an ageing workforce.
- Ensure that key Library information, policies and guidelines are available in accessible electronic formats.
- Ensure that the Library website, intranet and all digital applications are AA compliant with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0.
- Offer more transcripts of collection material including oral histories, manuscripts and books.
- Promote avenues for providing feedback and online user-testing to people with disability and the wider community.
- Provide refresher training for staff in the use of Adaptive Technology available in the Library.
- Deliver regular Adaptive Technology demonstrations for readers and visitors.

Systems and processes

Behind all the Library's offerings are systems and processes to ensure everything is delivered the best way it can be. By reviewing these systems and processes, and inviting feedback, we can find better solutions to make our facilities and services more accessible.

KEY ACTIONS

- Develop specific budget for accessibility costs.
- Continue to build the Library's collection with stories of people with disability, and support research in this area.
- Investigate portable hearing loop for areas where a permanent hearing loop installation is not achievable.
- Review and update 'general information' on all publications to ensure any infrastructure changes are captured.
- Reflect the diversity of the community through our communication and marketing strategies.
- Enhance the 'Plan your visit' webpage to include map with accessible routes, facilities and information on cafe menu options.
- Develop an online system for readers and visitors to provide us with feedback on the cafe.
- Continue to develop the 'Access and Inclusion' webpage.

How do we know we're on track?

Staff members will be asked to provide quarterly updates against their assigned actions in the operational version of this plan. Overall progress will be collated and presented to our Accessibility Advisory Group on a quarterly basis.

The Executive Sponsor of this plan is the Library's Chief Operating Officer who will provide Executive with an annual progress report.

This plan has been submitted to the New South Wales Disability Council and registered with the Australian Human Rights Commission.



High-level markers of progress

Aside from the particular markers of progress against each action in the Operational Plan, the following high-level markers will indicate that we are on track in achieving this plan:

1. More staff members with disability, or who feel comfortable reporting their access requirements.
2. Completion of accessible entrances and pathways between the Macquarie St building and Mitchell building.
3. An increase in attendance by people with disability to the Library's public programs.
4. Fewer complaints and more compliments received regarding accessibility.

John and Yolande Lai accessing the Library at home, photo: Joy Lai



