

Inquiry into Social Inclusion and Victorians with a Disability

Frankston City Council welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Victorian Parliament Family and Community Development Committee's Inquiry into Social Inclusion and Victorians with a Disability. Local governments are heavily involved in their communities, both in the provision of services, and in advocating on the behalf of local community concerns.

The social inclusion of Victorians with a disability is of particular concern to local governments, including Frankston City Council. Local government has a multiple mandate in relation to social inclusion for Victorians with a disability; due to our work with the disability community; our role in fostering community inclusion and connectedness; in the development and regulation of our urban environment; and in our planning and regulatory responsibilities.

Council is committed to ensuring that people with disabilities can fully participate in the daily life of their community, with meaningful opportunities to join in any activity or group, and appreciates this chance to share our views with the committee.

Section 1: Best Practice Projects

This section highlights examples of best practice within the Frankston municipality in relation to the social inclusion of people with a disability.

MetroAccess

MetroAccess is a funded program under the Victorian Department of Human Services' Disability Services Community Building Program. The aim of the MetroAccess program is to support communities to develop new ways of including people with a disability in local community life. MetroAccess officers are based in each of the 31 municipalities across metropolitan Melbourne, including within Frankston City Council.

Provided below are selected examples of the successes of Frankston City Council's MetroAccess program to highlight the importance of this program in supporting social inclusion for people with disabilities.

All abilities events

An important strategy of Frankston MetroAccess to improve the social inclusion of people with disabilities is the provision of all abilities events, such as arts and recreation activities. Frankston MetroAccess provides events that increase participation for people with a disability, but enhance the capacity of disability support providers; improve access to information for people with disabilities and that upskill people with disabilities to be involved in the planning and delivery of events.

An example of an all abilities event was *BeachFest*, held in November 2012. BeachFest brought together approximately 500 people, about half of whom had a disability. Participants took part in a range of beach front recreational activities run by local recreation providers, improving knowledge on the

accessibility of local recreation for people with a disability. The event was attended by individuals, groups and supported care groups, as well as primary school students, including special development and mainstream schools.

The location of the event on the Frankston foreshore was important in highlighting the accessibility of this prominent community space. The provision of local events is a recognised means¹ of improving social inclusion for members of the community by bringing them together around a common purpose. The inclusion of a diversity of community members, of all-abilities, including local schools was designed to foster feelings of acceptance and belonging within the community for participants with a disability, a group who are often marginalised.

The event further enhanced social inclusion through including amongst its event planning and volunteer team participants from the *Options Victoria* 'Transition to Employment' program, and Focus Disability Employment Service catering. Not only is volunteering a wonderful way to improve social inclusion, but training was provided to participants to gain skills that they could employ in their further professional pursuits.

Integrated planning and projects

A crucial role of the MetroAccess program is to facilitate integrated local community planning and projects, which engages and involves people with disabilities and their families, disability service providers and community organisations.

Council's MetroAccess program has undertaken numerous examples of integrated community planning to increase the social inclusion of people with a disability. One example is the accessible taxi drop off zone in Wells Street Frankston, a major activity spine within the Frankston Central Activities Area, the need for which was highlighted by the Disability Access and Inclusion Committee (DAIC). Frankston MetroAccess consulted with a range of stakeholders, including the DAIC, Frankston Taxis, taxi drivers and FCC traffic engineers in order to facilitate the development of an accessible taxi pickup/drop off point. Prior to this, this core component of the Frankston Central Activities Area was inaccessible to many members of the community with limited mobility. This inhibited their access to banking, shopping and entertainment for which this street is a major local hub.

The MetroAccess program performs an important role in influencing decision making and acting as advocates within Council for the recognition and resolution of issues affecting the lives of community members with a disability. Appropriate urban form is a crucial element in fostering social inclusion², and examples such as the accessible taxi drop off enhance access to both public and private spaces, as well as improving mobility for residents and visitors.

¹ Kelly, J-F. et al, *Social Cities*, Grattan Institute

² Kelly, J-F. et al, *Social Cities*, Grattan Institute

Critical elements of the MetroAccess Program

Frankston City Council extends its support for the continuance of the MetroAccess Program; in particular it's continued place-based and flexible approach; as well as the collaboration between state and local government.

Place based approach

A significant factor in the success of the MetroAccess program is that it is place-based in nature. This allows the MetroAccess program to identify local needs and the required responses. A locally based program ensures that the MetroAccess program is able to effectively engage with the community; including people with a disability and service providers, building networks and collaborating to address gaps within the local service system. This is of particular importance within a policy framework such as disability inclusion, where the range of disabilities covered by MetroAccess is so varied, and the needs of different people with disabilities even more so.

Flexibility in program guidelines

Another significant factor in the success of the MetroAccess program is the flexible program guidelines which allow responses to needs through a planned and opportunistic approach. The MetroAccess program has utilised this flexibility to both provide a range of programs, projects and events as well as supporting external providers to respond by filling identified gaps within the local service system.

Collaboration between levels of government

The MetroAccess program provides an example of effective collaboration between state and local government. The program is funded by the Victorian State Government and administered by local government. This enables a robust and stable network of disability professionals collaborating with other agencies and levels of government to share information and examples of best practice making the best use of public funds and maximising cost efficiencies. Consultation and collaboration are crucial to the development of successful policy directions and initiatives, and the ability of MetroAccess to support this is a further strength of the program.

Recommendations:

- That the Victorian Government continues its support for the MetroAccess program.
- That MetroAccess continues to be place-based and administered by local government.
- That MetroAccess funding continues to be flexible in nature.
- That future approaches to disability policy prioritise:
 - Adequate resourcing to support the meaningful participation of all stakeholders.
 - Opportunity to develop shared goals that reflect local needs for collaboration.
 - A consultative approach to the development of policy directions and initiatives

Frankston City Council Public Toilet Action Plan and Design Guidelines

Frankston City's Public Toilet Action Plan and Design Guidelines are an example of best practice in local government in the development and provision of high-quality, accessible and safe public toilet amenities. By designing toilets appropriate for people with high and complex needs, Council is committed to developing public facilities that go well beyond minimum access design standards in order to ensure access to Frankston's key destinations for all members of our community.

Frankston City's best-practice Public Toilet Action Plan and Design Guidelines were developed following the successful construction of a toilet for people with high and complex needs in Frankston's Central Activities Area. Council partnered with Peninsula Access Support and Training and the Victorian Department of Human Services (DHS) in the development of this facility. The facility was the first of its kind in Australia outside of an institutional setting. It includes universal male and female toilets, a baby change and feeding room and two accessible toilets with hoists and adult height adjustable change tables. One of these accessible toilets is available 24/7 via the universal key (MLAK). DHS provided a grant of \$200,000 to the project, and FCC contributed a further \$1.1 million, with further money allocated to the Public Toilet Action Plan and Design Guidelines.

The plan and guidelines were driven by Council's vision of achieving accessible design to 'enhanced' standards and embedding these principals in process and practice. The plan was developed using a collaborative model of community consultation that involved reference groups, individuals, businesses and cross Council representation, ensuring that the broad spectrum of community needs was realised.

Council's Public Toilet Action Plan has created access for many people with complex needs. By including adult change tables around Frankston's key destinations, Council has ensured that people who require such facilities are able to visit the Frankston Central Activities Area, the nearby Frankston foreshore and Frankston's iconic George Pentland Botanic Gardens, greatly enhancing the ability of all people to be included in the community's economic, retail, administrative, entertainment and recreational life. Without such an approach some of the community's most marginalised members would face additional barriers to participation and inclusion.

Recommendations:

- That the Victorian Government considers supporting other municipalities to build best-practice accessible toilets around key destinations.
- That the Victorian Government considers an awards system for universally designed buildings to encourage innovation and embed accessibility principles.
- That the Victorian Government extends grants to local government to improve accessibility in key community infrastructure.

Frankston Arts Centre

Arts Access Program

The Frankston Arts Centre Arts Access Program aims to increase the social inclusion of people of all abilities through participation in the arts. The Arts Access program and staffing resources are unique initiatives of the Frankston Arts Centre; no other local government-owned arts centre in Victoria employs a dedicated Arts Access Officer.

Venue and theatre access

Frankston Arts Centre is committed to ensuring a high level of accessibility so all people within the community can participate within the arts in Frankston. The Arts Centre is fitted with ramps, wider than legislated automatic doors, an entire row of removable theatre seats for wheelchairs, beds and other mobility devices, recharge power points for mobility devices and dedicated aisle seats for easy access for patrons requiring mobility assistance. The Arts Centre also supports live-captioned and Auslan interpreted performances and portable hearing assistance devices available for loan to boost hearing aids.

Training and career pathways

Frankston Arts Centre also provides dedicated industry training placements for people with a disability, in partnership with Registered Training Organisations (RTO), leading to employment as arts workers, theatre technicians, box office and front of house staff. This has also included supporting people with disabilities to achieve VCAL Certificates in Entertainment Industries and Certificates III and IV in Community Services Work.

Specialised programs

Frankston Arts Centre, through its Arts Access program also runs or supports a number of dedicated programs for people with disabilities. These include a range of art therapy classes for people with a range of disabilities, the immensely popular Cirque sur Roues (Circus on Wheels) for adults with a disability, respite and recreation activities for seniors, as well as a youth focused programs.

Marketing, promotion and advocacy

Frankston Arts Centre is committed to the provision of accessible information to support participation. The annual season brochure contains a dedicated Arts Access page, with all captioned and Auslan performances Icon-coded throughout the brochure. The Frankston Arts Centre website also includes dedicated Access and Inclusion pages and icon coding.

Recommendations:

- That Frankston Arts Centre's Arts Access program is noted as a significant example of best practice and the role of arts as a social inclusion model is acknowledged and encouraged in other municipalities.
- That the Victorian Government extends grants to local government owned performing arts centres to improve accessibility

Section 2: Unmet Needs

This section aims to highlight existing service gaps, and support the allocation of additional resources to local government in order to achieve greater social inclusion of people with disabilities.

Supported Accommodation

There is strong concern about a lack of supported accommodation available for people with disabilities. In a recent submission to Frankston City Council, the Frankston Peninsula Carers Association Inc. (FPCA), a group comprised of older carers of adult children, commented that the lack of supported accommodation in the region is now a crisis. Older carers of adult children are finding as they age that they are no longer able to provide an appropriate level of care for their children. Many, having failed to secure supported accommodation for their children in past attempts, share a strong concern about what will happen to their adult children once the carers are deceased. An inability to secure necessary supported accommodation creates negative health outcomes, distress and social isolation for those living with a disability. For people with a range of disabilities, be they physical, intellectual or psycho-social, various models of supported accommodation are the only appropriate form of accommodation. Further, such undersupply necessitates that many people with disabilities are housed in supported accommodation models inappropriate for their needs. This lack of supported accommodation targeted to local needs may contribute to inappropriate living situations and possibly homelessness within these groups. With the situation already in crisis, carers and people with disabilities of all ages are concerned for the future health and wellbeing of themselves and those whom they support.

Recommendations:

- That the Victorian Government produce and fund a long-term strategy for the adequate provision of a variety of models of supported accommodation.

Inclusion Support Program

Council recognises and values that the Australian Government has funded the Inclusion Support Program which provides childcare services the required practical supports in meeting the needs of children with disabilities and additional needs. However, Council perceives the needs of children with complex needs are not being met as effectively as possible due to shortfalls in this program. These are outlined below:

Priority groups

The identified priority groups within the Inclusion Support Program are too restrictive. This results in many children with complex behavioural issues, but who do not have a diagnosed disability, not being appropriately supported.

Many children of a preschool age are not able to be diagnosed and so the childcare service is therefore not receiving the necessary support. This occurs due to a range of factors, including (but not limited to) long waiting lists for

access to specialist services, the cost to families of specialist services; and parental denial of the presence of a disability.

Inclusion support subsidy

An Australian Government subsidy of \$16.92 contributes towards the cost associated with the employment of the additional childcare staff. While this subsidy is inadequate for all services; it is extremely inadequate for services with an over representation of children with a diagnosed disability; and may result in an unwillingness of private operators, who are profit driven, to support children with disabilities. For example, there is a long standing lack of privately provided long day care in Frankston North, which is the most disadvantaged neighbourhood in the municipality. In relation to young children, 64.1% have been identified as developmentally vulnerable on one or more domains of the 2012 Australian Early Development Index (AEDI) which is significantly higher than the state average of 19.5%³.

In response to this unmet need for long day care provision, Council operates the Mahogany Rise Child & Family Centre. As a result of the high levels of disability (over 40% of enrolled children have a diagnosed disability) and vulnerability in the area, the funding shortfall between the required levels of staffing and the Australian Government subsidy is up to \$100,000 per annum.

Inclusion support program guidelines

A greater level of guidance and support is required to ensure that childcare services are able to implement the Inclusion Support guidelines. The current approach of one Inclusive Support Facilitator per region means that not all childcare services receive an adequate level of support. This may require additional staffing EFT as well as more effective resources that can be accessed through a variety of formats, such as hard and soft copy.

School holiday care programs

While a diverse range of school holiday care programs are available within the community for primary school aged children, these programs do not cater for the needs of young people aged between 13-18 years with a disability. The lack of appropriate school holiday care programs for young people with a disability or high support needs, particularly with behaviours of concern has been a long standing and significant issue for families within the Frankston municipality. This unmet need has the greatest impact on working families, while other families also require access to suitable school holiday care programs for a range of reasons including respite. Reported impacts on families attributed to the lack of school holiday care programs for young people with a disability relate to limitations on socialisation opportunities for the young person as well as their siblings and parents; and employment participation and career progression opportunities of parents. Whilst limited funding has previously been provided by the Federal Government for the

³ Centre for Community Child Health, The Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne, *Australian Early Development Index, Community Profile 2012, Frankston Victoria*, 2012.

establishment of school holiday care programs for young people with disabilities, this was not adequate to sustain the complex requirements of the program.

Recommendations:

That the Victorian government advocate for modifications to the Inclusion Support Program so that:

- the priority groups include children with complex behavioural issues;
- a scale is used to assess the level of subsidy required,
- so that areas of high disadvantage receive an adequate level of financial assistance to meet children's needs;
- greater levels of support and guidance is provided to early childhood education and care services to enable them to implement the program guidelines.
- Funding is required to: support the establishment of suitable venues for school holiday care programs for young people with a disability, employment of multidisciplinary teams to meet the specific requirements of program participants; and the provision of a range of specialist and OH&S equipment.

The National Disability Insurance Scheme

A planned approach to communication is required to assist people with a disability and their carers as well as services and government to understand the impact of the implementation of the National Disability Insurance Scheme. Communication should provide regular and accessible information that is targeted to particular stakeholder requirements.

There is a lack of understanding within the community of the key elements of the National Disability Insurance Scheme, such as eligibility criteria; roles and responsibilities; and expected outcomes. For example, there is concern in the sector that the individual support payments will increase the workload of families and carers, particularly in regard to thoroughly scoping the wide range of services that may be appropriate to their needs.

The National Disability Insurance Scheme will support people until the age of 65, whereupon they will become "aged clients". However existing aged services are not currently well equipped to cater to non age-related disability. Age-related disability is reasonably predictable and uniform, whereas non age-related disability can be extremely varied. The aged care sector can not necessarily cater for this within existing human and financial resources.

Recommendations:

- That clear lines of communication are made available regarding the NDIS, such that all relevant parties are kept informed of developments, including on the planned rollout of the NDIS.
- That consideration is given to the best means of advising recipients of individual support payments to the range of available services.
- That appropriate aged services are made available for aging disability clients.

Appropriate Housing

Appropriate housing is one of the most important aspects of social inclusion⁴. Currently, there is an inadequate stock of housing designed for universal access in suitable locations. Suitable locations for accessible and appropriate housing affects social inclusion for people with a disability in a number of ways; it affects the ability of people with a disability to access transport, public spaces like libraries and parks, and private spaces such as cafes, churches and other people's homes. Where people have mobility or transport issues, housing must be located appropriately in relation to low-barrier community sites such as these if people with a disability are to be involved and engaged in their communities.

Currently local government has no authority to enforce a minimum supply of developments designed for universal access in and around activity centres and public transport hubs and routes. Programs from other organisations and levels of government fail to adequately prioritise appropriately located developments. Due to the strong correlation between disability and financial disadvantage, the current reliance on market mechanisms to achieve optimised goals for land use fails to ensure that accessible housing is appropriately located.

More attention needs to be given to the issue of appropriately located accessible housing in the future if we are to ensure that Victorians with a disability are to be meaningfully involved in their communities and achieve real social inclusion.

Recommendations:

- That the Victorian Government consider options to ensure that local government and all relevant agencies are able and encouraged to adequately prioritise the appropriate location of universally designed accessible housing.

Transport

Access to transport is critical in supporting meaningful social inclusion for people with a disability. Access to transport supports participation in all facets of community life including education, employment, leisure and health services and without such creates social exclusion for people with a disability. Many forms of transport are physically inaccessible for people with a disability, particularly public transport options, such as buses, that support local travel.

Recommendations:

- That all new and upgraded public transport infrastructure meet relevant standards.
- That the Victorian Government continue to monitor cost barriers to public transport for people with a disability

⁴ Kelly, J-F. et al, *Social Cities*, Grattan Institute

Buildings, facilities and spaces

The built environment, including public facilities and spaces as well as private businesses, can act as a significant barrier to social inclusion for people with a disability. This relates to access into and within a building. For example, the entrance may support access but the facilities within, such as toilets may not be appropriate for use by someone with a disability.

Access may be further limited by a range of in-built or surrounding design features, such as entrance locks, uneven surfaces, reflective surfaces, narrow doorways, and a lack of clear signage.

Accessibility is driven by a complex interplay of regulations, policies and legislation across all three levels of government and underpinned by the availability of financial resources. Councils face significant challenges in upgrading ageing infrastructure to enable accessibility for people with a disability.

Recommendations:

- That the Victorian Government considers ways to prioritise the improved accessibility of the built environment and urban form.

Citations List

Centre for Community Child Health, The Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne, *Australian Early Development Index, Community Profile 2012, Frankston Victoria*, 2012.

Kelly, J-F.; Breadon, P.; Davis, C.; Hunter, A.; Mares, P.; Mullerworth, D.; Weidmann, B., 2012, *Social Cities*, Grattan Institute, Melbourne.

National People with Disabilities and Carer Council, *SHUT OUT: The Experience of People with Disabilities and their Families in Australia National Disability Strategy Consultation Report*, Commonwealth of Australia 2009.