

ARTS ACCESS

news

spring 2001

Arts Victoria Leads the Way

On 26th September, 2001, Arts Victoria, the State Government's arts funding body, launched its new Disability Action Plan. A subcommittee, made up of representatives from each of Arts Victoria's programs (Fiona Beckwith, Christopher McDermott, Brian Tuke, Karen Raabe, Warren Peart and Becky Sharpe) and facilitated by Caroline Bowditch, the Training and Development Coordinator from Arts Access, developed the Plan with the aim of expanding access to and participation in the Arts by all Victorians.

The process that Arts Access designed for the specific needs of Arts Victoria in developing this plan included hands-on, intensive Disability Awareness Training for all staff. This was included to ensure that the staff had the chance to really appreciate some of the difficulties that people with disabilities face, in accessing the services of Arts Victoria.

Penny Hutchinson, Director of Arts Victoria, commented in her launch speech, "Arts Victoria is taking a leadership role within the arts, in ensuring better access for all people within our society. We are proud to launch this Disability Action Plan as a key component of our commitment to being responsive to the needs of people with disabilities."

Arts Victoria have also committed to running 'refresher' training sessions regularly, and are currently planning an Industry Forum to



highlight the obligations of the Disability Discrimination Act, and to outline what arts organisations can start to do to make the arts more accessible to people with disabilities.

Arts Access congratulates Arts Victoria on showing the initiative to implement a relevant, achievable and effective Disability Action Plan.

If you would like a copy of the plan, go to the publications section of the Arts Victoria website at www.arts.vic.gov.au or call on 9954 5000, TTY: 9682 4864, or email: artsvic@dpc.vic.gov.au

Caroline Bowditch speaks at the launch of Arts Victoria's Disability Action Plan (Penny Hutchinson at right)



Caroline Bowditch from Arts Access (far right) with five members of the Disability Action Plan subcommittee and Penny Hutchinson, director of Arts Victoria, standing behind.



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From the desk of the Executive Director

One of the things that we try to do regularly at Arts Access is plan new work and new directions. When doing so, we take into consideration what's happening in the world around us, what are the changing needs of people with disabilities and people who are disadvantaged, and then we figure out, with the aid of the Board and the staff, how art can play a role in fulfilling some of those needs.

At Arts Access, we do this in two main ways: Through our Access Program, we aim to increase the access of individuals to the arts as audience members or consumers of art; and through our Artistic program, we aim to

increase opportunities for people to participate in the arts in a more hands-on manner.

Over the next few years, we plan a shift in the emphasis of our work, to ensure that sustainability is a key goal in all of our projects. There will be a greater emphasis on strategic planning in the development of projects and a move to foster creative partnerships, so that instead of being the 'key player', we become the 'facilitator' of projects that are owned by the communities or organisations involved.

We will ensure that future projects include training and professional development for management, mentoring for community workers and support workers, and the development of longer term project outcomes. As an organisation, we will focus more on our service as a peak body, and provider of information and support to arts, community and health organisations and groups. By increasing our outreach work, which includes: membership services; our newsletter and other publications; our website; artist register; training programs; forums, conferences and participation on various committees; we can provide expertise and support in a very effective way.



Please direct enquiries about the Arts Access newsletter to:
Arts Access
24 Eastern Road, South Melbourne Victoria Australia 3205
03 / 9699 8299 Telephone 03 / 9699 8868 Facsimile
03 / 9699 7636 TTY
Email info@artsaccess.com.au
Website <http://www.artsaccess.com.au>

This edition of Arts Access News is also available on-line at www.artsaccess.com.au

An audio tape version of this newsletter is available. Please call the office to arrange your copy.

Our Artistic Program

Arts Access is currently running arts workshops in Tallangatta, Spotswood, Dingley, St Kilda, Fitzroy, Box Hill, Elsternwick, Carlton and Footscray. We are initiating and establishing new projects, Mornington Peninsula and in the outer Western region of Melbourne. Hey, we sure get around!

At the time of publication, our arts projects currently involve more than 200 participants, 32 artists, 11 support workers, 5 Project

"Lighthouse", Saturday Morning Art Class



Coordinators and 1 Program Manager. The projects are diverse and include: rap dancing, filmmaking, costume and design, voice and singing, painting, drawing, mosaics, multimedia, writing, book making, circus skills and theatre production.



A page of Pat Mendoza's Artist Book, Saturday Morning Art Class

We recently commissioned nine female emerging and professional artists to create individual artworks reflecting their own interpretation of women's wellbeing. This collection features simple, strong and positive images of women in all stages of life. Arts Access is working in partnership with BreastScreen Victoria to ensure that these artworks will be on public display in the near future.

Profile: Art Day An Artistic Program for People with an Intellectual Disability

The participants in Art Day South have been very busy creating wild and wonderful costumes and wacky characters to go inside them! They are now preparing to show off their creations at a "Salon-style" performance and exhibition to be held at Theatreworks, 14 Acland Street, St Kilda on Friday November 9 between 2pm - 4pm. If you wish to attend, contact Jo Cohen, Art Day Coordinator, on 9699 8299, as there is limited space for the audience. The exhibition will also be on display from Saturday November 10 to Monday November 12 between 12noon - 4pm.

Meanwhile, Art Day West participants recently took part in Handspan's "Placement" project for Melbourne Fringe, decorating miniature houses which were placed around the city and photographed in situ by the Handspan team, and the photos then exhibited at the North Melbourne Town Hall.

Art Day West participants are now working on songbooks and soft-sculpture self-portraits, which will be exhibited at the end of the year.

In the spotlight: Asphyxia A Deaf artist

I am a Deaf artist and although I endeavour to use my Deafness to maximum advantage in my performances, I do experience difficulties in my work due to my inability to hear. I employ a secretary to make phone calls for me to book gigs and I hire a private trainer to teach me circus and theatrical skills. Participating in group work is also problematic for me, even with an interpreter, so it is no accident that most of my projects are conceived and facilitated by me alone.

As a Deaf acrobat and circus performer, I have been focusing on developing shows with a collaboration of acrobatics and Auslan, such as signing to music while swinging on a trapeze.

The Caged Girl is my trapeze act that tells the story of how I built my house with my own hands. I wrote song lyrics that tell the story of the building process, the challenges I faced and the emotions I experienced. I had music composed for the lyrics, and I sit on the trapeze, signing the words to tell the story and

performing physical skills that symbolically represent the building process. This act has a strong message to young women about having your own dreams and setting out to achieve them even if society says it's not what girls do.

The Melbourne Fringe Festival commissioned me to develop a Deaf hula hooping clown character, Dr Decibel, who is a "professional audiologist". Dr Decibel roves the street wearing a white lab coat and pushing a pram full of bizarre equipment for testing the hearing of audience participants. During the performance she uses light-hearted comedy to encourage audience members to think about how they relate to Deaf people.

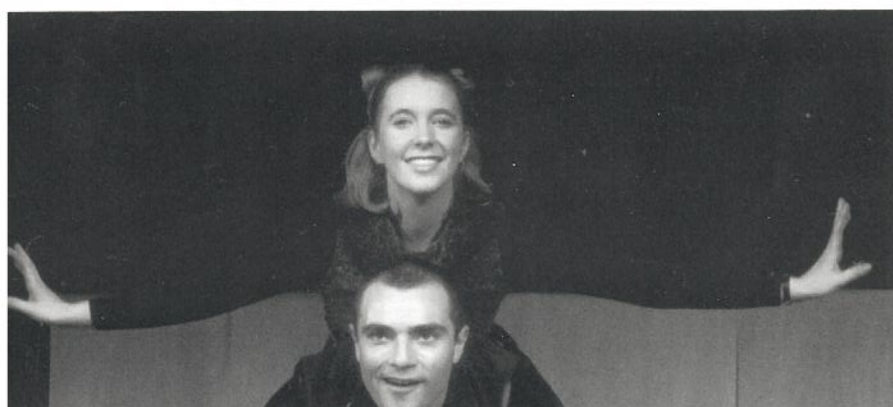
Funded by Next Wave Festival, I recently developed a full-length theatre show, Blood Makes Noise, a love story told with circus and sign language, which I perform with George Filev. The show is a funny, moving and educational exploration of Deaf issues and will be performed at the Victorian Arts Centre. Regional and national tours are being planned for next year.



Asphyxia performs hula hoops at Hot August Night



Asphyxia balances on the trapeze in the Southgate Atrium



Asphyxia with George Filev in her show, Blood Makes Noise

"Deaf does not mean Dumb" by Ro Marriott

Can you imagine how you would feel, if, after years of normal hearing, you were suddenly struck deaf? Most people, unless their deafness is the result of an accident, gradually become a little more "hard of hearing" each year. Over time they become, more or less, accustomed to the disability.

My father was deaf, my father-in-law was deaf, and my best friend is deaf. Consequently, I learned to yell, project, and enunciate. I also empathized, saying, "I can imagine how hard it must be for you!" Like hell I could.

Occasionally, I have been troubled with earache from a wax build-up, a problem easily remedied by eardrops. Stabbing pains alerted me that the condition had returned. I reached for the drops. Head lolled on one side, I waited while the liquid swirled and gurgled. Sudden silence. It was as if something heavy was pressing on my eardrums. I had been struck deaf.

At dinner with friends, I explained, to sympathetic mumbles my predicament. Discussion was half heard in snatches as I turned my head first one way, then the other. Much talk on the background music. What background music? My response to a question caused hilarity. I lapsed into silence, smiling and nodding vacuously, glad when it was time to go home. Empathy with a vengeance.

At the surgery the next day, the doctor syringed my ears and I could hear. Music, birdsong, voices. The world was a loud and joyful place and I

started thinking about the unkind way we treat deaf people. If a blind person stumbles and falls, we rush to help. If a deaf person mishears and responds inconsequently, we either smile pityingly or dismiss them as a senile idiot.

The Macquarie dictionary defines deaf as lacking, or totally deprived of the sense of hearing; refusing to listen; heedless, inattentive. Far too often, we apply the secondary meanings. Too bad if they have no choice. Do we ever stop to think how difficult it is for someone to produce a sensible answer if they haven't heard the question?

Just how many people are affected by deafness? Official figures show a bewildering inconsistency concerning the numbers of Australians with hearing impairment. The statistics fall

(continued overleaf)



Sign interpreter, Lyn Gordon, shows how to communicate clearly with hearing impaired and deaf people. Photo: Vicki Jones Photography

somewhere between 7 and 22 per cent of people with total or partial deafness. According to Vicdeaf's Information and Rehabilitation Officer, Bronwyn Porter, deafness is notoriously difficult to self diagnose as it often develops gradually and people tend to acquire compensatory mechanisms to help them get by. Whatever the statistics, hearing loss has been identified as the most common of physical impairments. There are a lot of people out there saying, "I beg your pardon".

Communication difficulties resulting from hearing loss have a major effect on all areas of life. If you suspect you have a hearing problem, visit your GP and arrange for a hearing test. For many people, hearing aids can make a big difference and there are products available to help them cope.

Learning techniques for communicating with those with hearing loss are very important. Since my deaf attack, I've been watching people carefully and it is surprising the numbers who speak while eating, (remember the manners your mum tried to teach you), put their hands in front of their mouths or turn their heads away. The rules are simple: Gain the attention of the deaf or hearing impaired person before

you speak. Speak slowly and clearly. Look directly at them. Don't smoke, chew gum, eat or put your hand near your mouth when you are speaking. And the most important rule of all - remember deaf does not mean "dumb".

For more information, contact:
Vicdeaf
101 Wellington Parade Sth
East Melbourne 3002
Ph: 9657 8199

S T A F F
Executive Director
Nicole Beyer
Finance and Administration Manager
Simon Gould
Artistic Program Manager
Ruth Whittingham
Artistic Project Coordinators
Jo Cohen
Anne Riggs
Access Program Manager
Fiona Hanrahan
EASE Administration Officer
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Training Coordinator
Caroline Bowditch
Administration Officers
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Become a member and help us to reach more people

Arts Access is a not-for-profit organization that requires the support of our members to continue our work. Why not help us to reach more people by becoming an Arts Access or EASE Member.

Arts Access membership is open to everyone. Your membership contributes to the overall running of our Artistic Program, Entertainment Access Service (EASE), Training Program and Access/Advocacy work.

- Annual Membership gives you:
- "Arts Access News" to keep to up-to-date with the year's activities
 - invitations to public events
 - discounts on various Arts Access services and products
 - voting rights at our Annual General Meeting

- Membership prices are:
- \$25 Individual
 - \$55 Community and Small Organisations
 - \$195 Corporate Groups

EASE membership is for people whose access to venues or choice of seating is restricted due to physical or sensory impairment.

In addition to receiving the Arts Access Newsletter, EASE Membership gives you:

- Membership Card – for use as identification for discounts and access requirements
- Ticket Update – a bi-monthly publication listing upcoming events and access information
- Information on audio described and sign interpreted events
- Venue Access – information sheets available when booking, access information available by phone. Free Vic Venue Guide!
- Booking Service – use of the EASE Ticket service to purchase tickets and arrange special seating requirements to arts and entertainment events
- Special Officers – notification of discounted and free tickets

Membership Form

Please fax or send to Arts Access, 24 Eastern Road South Melbourne Vic 3205 Fax: 03 / 9699 8299

Arts Access Member			EASE Membership		
Individual	\$25	<input type="checkbox"/>	Individual	\$25	<input type="checkbox"/>
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I would like to make a Donation of (please tick)
\$20 ☐ \$50 ☐ \$100 ☐ Other

Payment

Please find enclosed a cheque / money order for the amount of \$
or please debit my

Bankcard ☐ Mastercard ☐ Visa ☐ Amex ☐
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Signature

All Donations of \$2 or more are tax deductible and greatly appreciated!

Moreland Music Initiative

The Moreland Music Initiative is starting a community band for people with a chronic illness or disability and their friends. We are looking for musicians who can play an instrument to at least AMEB Grade 4 level and can read music (Braille and large print music available). Rehearsals will be held on Saturday mornings in Coburg. If you'd like to join the band, or need more information please call Anthea on 9384 0325.

**ARTS
VICTORIA**



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email • info@artsaccess.com.au
Website and Artist Register (for Artists and Employers)
• <http://www.artsaccess.com.au>

print design • www.slightly.net

If undeliverable return to:

ARTS ACCESS

24 Eastern Road,
South Melbourne, VIC, 3205

Telephone (+61 3) 9699 8299 Facsimile (+61 3) 9699 8868
TTY (+61 3) 9699 7636 EASE Bookings (+61 3) 9699 8497

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Ms Anne Sedgley
State Library Of Victoria
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MELBOURNE VIC 3000