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MEDIA RELEASE

February 25, 1993

Arts Access developing Cultural Exchange Program with China

Arts Access, a Melbourne based organisation working with people with disabilities in the arts, is developing a unique cultural exchange initiative with China's Jilin and Jiangsu Provinces.

Arts Access is liaising with the Jilin Foreign Cultural Exchange Centre and the Jiangsu Provincial Department of Culture to develop a Cultural Exchange Program focussing on arts activities with people with disabilities - the first program of its kind to be initiated by an Australian arts organisation.

Jiangsu Province is Victoria's sister-state in China. Both provincial agencies have identified the field of arts and disability as an area of particular interest for a cultural exchange program between Australia and China.

The proposed program, which is planned to begin in 1994, includes:

- * a major public exhibition of artworks by people with disabilities;
- * a series of workshops run by artists with and without disabilities; and
- * a range of seminars and conferences focussing on the valuable role the arts can play in the lives of people with disabilities.

Arts Access' Executive Director, Ms Judith Isherwood and Arts Access' Program Manager, Ms Bobbie Hodge will visit China from February 28th to March 15th, 1993 to begin discussions and negotiations and to evaluate possibilities for the program.

Their itinerary will include visits to schools and communities that work with people with disabilities, meetings with artists and disability organisations - including the Chinese Federation for the Disabled in Beijing - and consultations with the provincial cultural agencies.

"Programs such as this will be invaluable in raising the general community's awareness of the scope of activity in the arts and disability sector, both here and overseas," said Judith Isherwood, Arts Access' Executive Director.

"Australia and China have much to gain through such an exchange. Both countries will be enriched by the greater participation of people with disabilities in the cultural lives of their communities and artists working in this developing field will find new possibilities for their artistic practise."

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The program will target artists across all artforms, people with disabilities, community arts workers, educators, disability support workers, health care workers, and institution-based staff including therapists, nursing and medical personnel.

"The program will build links between disability communities and artists in both countries and will provide a model for similar programs with other countries in the Asia-Pacific region," Ms Isherwood said.

The initiative has been enthusiastically supported by the Community Cultural Development Board (CCDB) of the Australia Council, the Federal government's arts funding and advisory body. The CCDB has provided funding for early development of the program, including travel to China.

Arts Access is developing the cultural exchange program in consultation with arts and disability organisations in both countries, assisted by the Cultural Counsellor at the Australian Embassy in Beijing. The Commonwealth Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Australia-China Council have also expressed interest in the program.

Arts Access

Arts Access is a non-profit community arts organisation working to create opportunities in the arts with people with disabilities and people disadvantaged by social conditions. Since 1974 Arts Access has operated a range of arts programs in diverse community settings including public hospitals, institutions, prisons, schools, aged care homes and community centres.

Based in Victoria, Arts Access plays a significant national role in Australia's arts and disability sector through its development of model programs of artistic activity, advocacy and consultation with communities, government agencies and the arts and entertainment industry.

Arts Access achieves its objectives through:

- * the Artistic Program, which manages 35-40 community-based projects annually;
- * the Resource Unit, which supports the independent development and management of arts activities by other groups; and
- * the Entertainment Access Service (EASE), which provides a low cost ticketing service for people with disabilities and works to improve physical access to entertainment, arts and sporting venues.

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