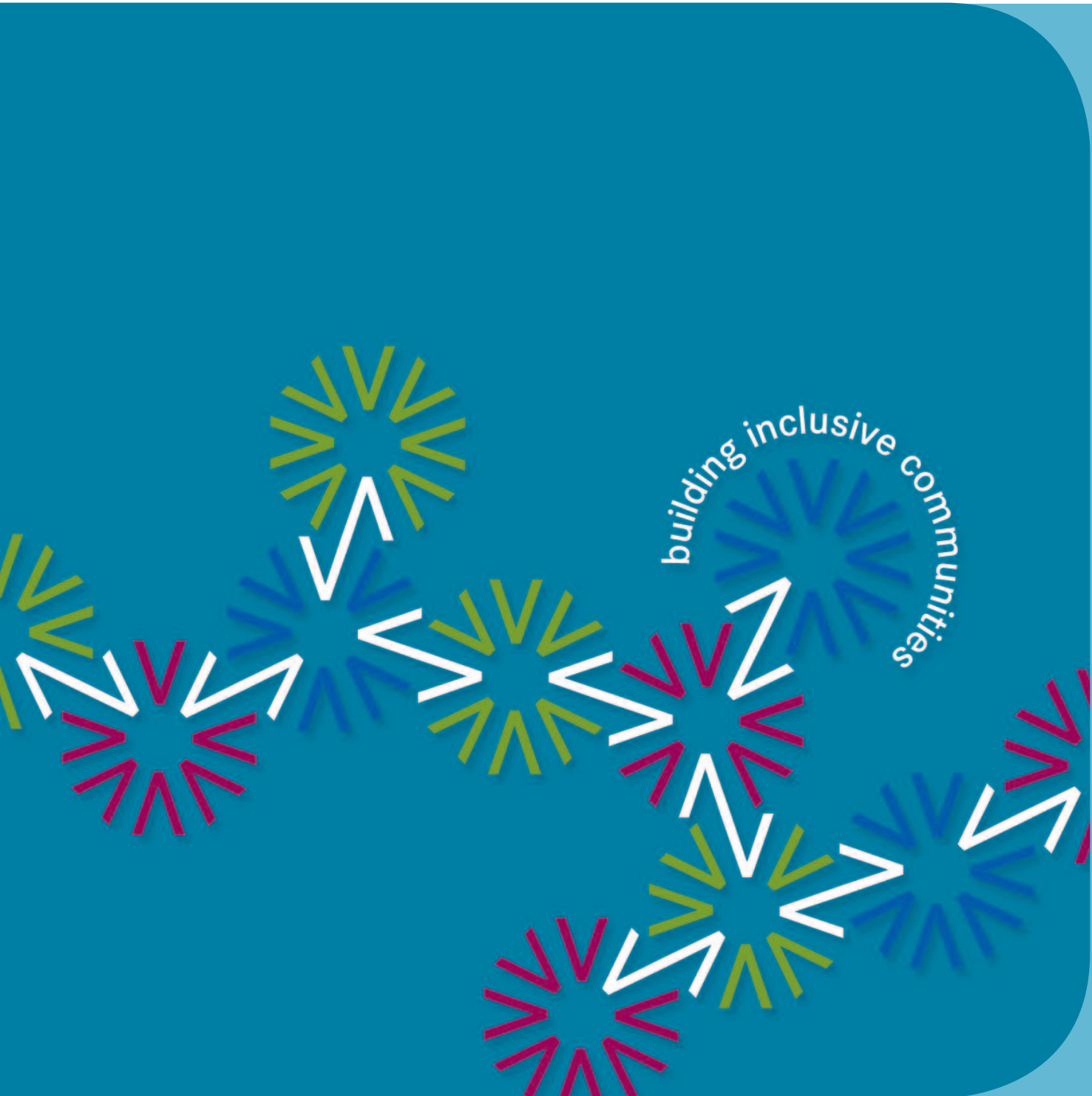


The Community Building Program in Disability Services

Supporting self-directed lifestyles for Victorians with a disability



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Foreword



The *Victorian State Disability Plan 2002-2012* describes a vision for a stronger, more inclusive community. One of the Government's major strategies towards this vision has been the Community Building Program, known in local communities as MetroAccess, RuralAccess and deafaccess.

By taking a local approach to building more inclusive communities, we aim to draw on the unique strengths of local communities and ensure that people with a disability can feel as though they belong no matter where they live in Victoria.

The Community Building Program in Disability Services: supporting self-directed lifestyles for Victorians with a disability reaffirms the Government's commitment to this program. The program complements the work being undertaken to transform disability supports to become more self-directed, responsive and flexible. Inclusive local communities can enable people with a disability to live more independently and with more dignity and choice.

I commend the principles of building inclusive communities to you and I encourage people and organisations in local communities to continue to work in partnership to build a stronger, more inclusive community.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'Lisa Neville'. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Hon Lisa Neville MP
Minister for Community Services

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Introduction

The Department of Human Services Disability Services Division recently released *Support Your Way: A self-directed approach for Victorians with a disability* which provides a shared understanding of self-directed approaches for people with a disability in Victoria and establishes the direction for the reorientation of supports so that they are consistent with self-directed approaches. It is timely, therefore, to reaffirm the commitment of Disability Services to supporting communities to be more inclusive of people with a disability.

A key goal of the *Victorian State Disability Plan 2002-2012* is to build inclusive communities. The Community Building Program (known locally as RuralAccess, MetroAccess and deafaccess) was established to progress a new approach within Disability Services, where the community is the primary focus for change and development. This approach is complementary to the expansion in Victoria of a self-directed approach to supporting people with a disability.

People with a disability in Victoria have told us that they feel **apart from**, rather than a **part of** their community.¹ National and international research confirms this trend, acknowledging that while people with a disability are living **in** the community, they are not necessarily regarded as members **of** their communities.

The Community Building Program is a key strategy for the Department of Human Services to make sure that people who receive disability support services have the opportunity to participate in all aspects of community life. The program aims to challenge the exclusion and marginalisation that many people with a disability experience. It recognises and affirms people with a disability as valued members of our communities and aims to ensure that they are actively engaged in community planning and decision-making.

Research has shown that there are positive outcomes for the health, safety, self-esteem, social connectedness and economic status of people who live in communities which respect and value the diversity of their people. The benefits of an inclusive community reach all members of that community, not just people with a disability.

In order to achieve more inclusive communities, the Community Building Program is committed to working with a broad range of partners in local communities, including people with a disability and their communities, local government, disability support providers, other community organisations and other government departments.

This document provides an overview of the Disability Services Division Community Building Program and describes why and how the program is implemented by Disability Services, highlights the role of the program in supporting service reorientation, and establishes the next steps for the program.

1. As reported in *The Aspirations of People with a Disability within an Inclusive Victorian Community*, Department of Human Services 2000.

Relevant legislation and policy

The current legislation and policy context relating to people with a disability in Victoria provides a clear context for the Community Building Program.

The *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*, which Australia ratified in 2008, promotes the following principles:

- Respect for inherent dignity, individual autonomy including the freedom to make one's own choices, and independence of persons
- Non-discrimination
- Full and effective participation and inclusion in society
- Respect for difference and acceptance of persons with disabilities as part of human diversity and humanity
- Equality of opportunity
- Accessibility
- Equality between men and women
- Respect for the evolving capacities of children with disabilities and respect for the right of children with disabilities to preserve their identities

The *Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* reinforces and protects the civil and political rights of all Victorian people.

The *Disability Act 2006* is guided by principles of human rights and citizenship. It specifies how people with a disability in Victoria should receive supports, with more self-determination and dignity. It also recognises that in order for people with a disability to participate in the community, a range of barriers must be removed. It takes a whole-of-government and whole-of-community approach to the removal of barriers, with Disability Action Plans named as the key mechanism for this.

Growing Victoria Together was released in 2001 and outlines the government's 'vision for Victoria to 2010 and beyond' and highlights 'building cohesive communities and reducing inequalities' as one of eleven strategic issues for the government. This community building approach is based on listening to local experience, supporting local connections and investing in local community infrastructure.

A Fairer Victoria (published annually since 2005) is the government's social policy statement and has a strong focus on community, with a stated intention to create strong, active, confident and resilient communities. It outlines the government's role as a facilitator of activities that aim to strengthen communities and places an increased focus on the role of local government. Guided by *A Fairer Victoria*, there are a number of government departments who have adopted a community building approach.

The *Victorian State Disability Plan 2002-2012* highlights three key goals for changing the way people with a disability are supported in Victoria:

- Promoting individual choice,
- Building inclusive communities,
- Promoting whole-of-government planning.

It is the first disability plan in Victoria to take a whole-of-government and whole-of-community approach to disability.

What is community building?

The Victorian Government, through *Growing Victoria Together* and *A Fairer Victoria*, has a commitment to community building. Community building is more commonly referred to in Victoria as community strengthening and is defined by the State Government in the following way:

Community strengthening is a sustained effort to increase involvement and partnership among members of a community to achieve common objectives. It involves local people, community organisations, government, business and philanthropic organisations working together to achieve agreed social, economic and environmental outcomes.

A community building approach is based on the understanding that all people have valuable contributions to make to their community. The Victorian approach to community building has been developed in accordance with international experience and in particular that of the United Kingdom (UK), where a range of models and programs have evolved over a fifteen year period. Key elements of a community building approach include:

- Making communities stronger by building on their existing assets;
- Respecting the diversity of people;
- Involving communities in decisions which affect their lives;
- Building better connections between community groups, businesses and government; and
- Giving people equal access to information and services.

Both the Victorian and the UK models of community building have mainly taken a place-based approach to addressing disadvantage, as opposed to working with specific population groups (such as people with a disability). Here in Victoria, Neighbourhood Renewal is one example of a place-based community building model.

The Disability Services Community Building Program takes a population-based approach to community building, in combination with a place-based approach. The target communities are not solely geographically based, but based on the common experience of having a disability. The program features the same elements of community building as described above, but the communities involved are communities of people with a disability who live in a local area. In this context, the Disability Services Community Building Program is considered unique and provides an important insight about, and builds the foundations for, a strong community for people with a disability.

Related community building initiatives

The Victorian Government is investing in community building across a range of initiatives, including:

Neighbourhood Renewal

A whole-of-government program, led by the Department of Human Services, which brings together the resources of local residents, businesses and community groups to tackle disadvantage in areas with a high concentration of public housing.

Community Renewal

A whole-of-government program, led by the Department of Planning and Community Development, which brings residents in disadvantaged local areas, together with businesses, government and local organisations to help transform their community into a place of opportunity and activity.

DPCD Regional Teams

In each state government region, the Department of Planning and Community Development has teams which focus on both land use planning and community development outcomes responding to local priorities.

Bushfire Reconstruction and Recovery

More recently, the Commonwealth and Victorian Governments established the Victorian Bushfire Reconstruction and Recovery Authority to oversee and coordinate the largest recovery and rebuilding program Victoria has ever faced. The Authority is working with communities, businesses, charities, local government and other government departments to help rebuild communities affected by the February 2009 bushfires.

The Community Building Program in Disability Services recognises the importance of working with these and other community building initiatives to ensure that people with a disability are involved in the initiatives and that their needs are accounted for in planning. In addition, the Community Building Program has strong relationships with state and local government community building initiatives which specifically target people with a disability.

Office for Disability

The Office for Disability, located within the Department of Planning and Community Development is guided by the Victorian Government's commitment to improving the lives of people with a disability and creating accessible and inclusive communities. The Office takes a whole-of-government approach to encouraging and influencing Victorian Government policy and activities to achieve these outcomes. The work of the Office for Disability is guided by the *Victorian State Disability Plan 2002-2012*, the *Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities* and the *UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*.

The Office works in collaboration with people with a disability, the community and the government, non-government and private sectors to address barriers to the participation of Victorians with a disability in areas such as housing, education and the arts. More specifically the Office supports the Victorian Disability Advisory Council, the development of disability action plans across the Victorian public and community sectors and manages a range of programs, projects and activities such as the Disability Advocacy Program and Community Awareness and research projects.

Access for All Abilities

Sport and Recreation Victoria, also based in the Department of Planning and Community Development, has developed the Access for All Abilities (AAA) program. The AAA program is based in local community organisations and uses a community building model to develop inclusive sport and recreation environments for people with a disability.

Local Government

Local government in Victoria has had a long-standing commitment to disability action planning to ensure Council facilities and services are accessible and responsive. Because the Community Building Program places importance on a locally-based approach, it is important to work closely with individual councils in order to reach local communities. In addition, Disability Services works in partnership with the Municipal Association of Victoria to ensure that the whole local government sector is supported in undertaking disability-specific community building.

State and local government share with Disability Services the vision and goals of the *Victorian State Disability Plan 2002-2012*, and therefore it is important that the Community Building Program works in a collaborative and complementary way in local communities and at the state level with other disability-specific community building efforts in order to build a more inclusive Victoria.

The role of community building in Disability Services

With Building Inclusive Communities as one of three major goals for the *Victorian State Disability Plan 2002-2012*, community building work is being undertaken as part of a range of programs within Disability Services and within other government departments. Through the *Quality Framework for Disability Services in Victoria*, all disability support services are required to adopt a community inclusion and participation approach. The *Workforce Strategy of the Victorian Industry Development Plan* recognises community building as a key skill needed by disability support workers.

The Community Building Program has a role in supporting other programs in their community inclusion work, as well as leading community building in local communities.

The community membership equation

The community membership equation illustrates the complementary nature of the various functions within Disability Services.



The work of the Community Building Program aims to benefit all people with a disability, and indeed all community members. The program has a particular emphasis on those people who receive disability support services. Many people are transitioning from being recipients of services in group settings with limited opportunities to make choices, to a more independent, self-directed and flexible style of support, as described in *Support Your Way: A self-directed approach for Victorians with a disability*. The Community Building Program supports this transition by working with the local community to become more welcoming and inclusive, and by facilitating partnerships between disability service providers and the broader local community.

The Community Building Program complements the direct service work funded through Disability Services by targeting communities and building a readiness in mainstream providers to support people with a disability. The program recognises the knowledge and expertise of disability support providers in understanding how people with a disability can be included in their community in more meaningful ways, and has a key role to play in working with disability support providers to help to build relationships between the disability support sector and the broader community. This may involve:

- Opening communication channels between disability support providers and the broader community;
- Introducing disability support providers into local community planning activities;
- Matching up community organisations or businesses with disability support providers to increase community participation opportunities;
- Identifying potential pathways for people with a disability to move from a specialist support setting to a mainstream community setting;
- Supporting disability service providers in developing and implementing new models of service;
- Developing training or learning opportunities to enhance community participation.

The Community Building Program

Principles and approaches

The Community Building Program is shaped by a set of principles which paint a picture of a strong, active community where people with a disability make valued contributions.

Social Inclusion

People with a disability, their family and support networks are embraced as belonging, sharing responsibility, and contributing to their communities.

Accessibility

All people should be able to find and use information and services and confidently move around the physical environment within their community.

Diversity

A culturally rich and diverse society is valued, and respect and harmony are actively promoted between people of all of races, cultures, languages and religions. Aboriginal Victorians are acknowledged and respected as first Australians and original custodians of the land, and the need for improved outcomes in Aboriginal health and wellbeing is recognised.

The work of the program draws on a number of approaches to community building and disability.

Social Model of Disability

According to this model, people with a disability have their opportunities constrained by the ways communities are planned and organised around the needs of non-disabled people, rather than by their own impairment. It follows from this that there is a need to target communities and initiate change in local communities to promote access and inclusion.

Local Area Planning

Local area planning allows for better co-ordination between government, the community and the private sector. It takes an holistic view of a local community and provides a basis for engaging and mobilising the full range of resources in an area.

Assets-Based Community Development

An assets-based approach to community building identifies and works with the strengths of a local community, including people, institutions and physical features.

Partnership

A partnership approach is useful for bringing together a range of skills and resources for a common goal. Strong partnerships have clear purpose, benefits for all partners, and are carefully planned and monitored.

Service Reorientation

The program supports the goal of re-orienting disability supports to a self-directed approach which provides greater choice and flexibility and supports community participation. The work of the program is designed to be complementary to the work being undertaken towards this goal.

Health Promotion

Health promotion is an approach which links improvements in health and wellbeing to a range of key environmental determinants: the social, built, natural and economic attributes of environments. This program aims to build environments which contribute to the health and wellbeing of people with a disability.

Objectives

In order to achieve the State Disability Plan goal of building inclusive communities, the Community Building Program has five major objectives:

1. To mobilise and support people with a disability to **optimise participation** in the life of their local community.
2. To build and **strengthen the community's capacity** to provide support to people with a disability and their families.
3. To facilitate **integrated local community planning** and coordination which engages and involves people with a disability and their families, disability service providers and community organisations.
4. To work with existing **disability service providers** to enhance their capacity to provide relevant and appropriate supports in the community.
5. To improve **access to information** about relevant services and community activities available to people with a disability in their communities.

Program structure

Disability Services Division at the Central and Regional level work together on the Community Building Program. At each level of this structure the program has a specific community building role which supports and resources others in the organisation to incorporate community building practice into their programs, in addition to leading specific Community Building Program initiatives.

Disability Services Division Central Office sets the policy and directions for the Community Building Program. This role includes:

- Supporting and resourcing the Regional Offices in implementing the program;
- Monitoring and reporting on the development and achievements of the Community Building Program and co-ordinating evaluation of the program;
- Supporting all programs of Disability Services Division to incorporate a community building approach in order to promote participation in the community by people with a disability;
- Developing links and partnerships across commonwealth, state and local government initiatives with a view to increasing the visibility of disability in other community building initiatives.

The Regional Office Community Building Program role is to administer the operations of the program. This role includes:

- Providing ongoing support to local auspice agencies and workers;
- Monitoring and reporting on the development and success of regional community building projects and initiatives;
- Planning, communication and liaison between local community building providers including regional network meetings, planning forums and training opportunities;
- Developing a framework for regional community building planning and priority setting;
- Liaison and networking across regional government programs and initiatives
- Developing initiatives which link programs across Disability Services including Disability Accommodation Services, Disability Client Services and a range of partnership initiatives with community service organisations.

The RuralAccess, MetroAccess and deafaccess auspice agencies implement the program at a local level. This role includes:

- Using an integrated local area planning approach for planning for a local community which is more accessible and inclusive for people with a disability;
- Taking a lead role in establishing networks to facilitate local partnership strategies;
- Using a community building approach to develop and implement a range of responses across all areas of community life.

Key features of the Community Building Program

Local presence

The Community Building Program involves more than 60 workers across the state who work with local communities. Most of these workers are employed by local councils, while others are employed by local community organisations. In metropolitan Melbourne they are called MetroAccess Workers, in regional and rural Victoria they are called RuralAccess Workers. There are also five deafaccess workers in the non-metropolitan regions who work specifically with the Deaf and hard-of-hearing communities. The role of the local workers includes:

- Mapping community issues, resources and opportunities and developing a Community Building Plan in response;
- Establishing networks to facilitate local partnership strategies which are responsive to the needs and aspirations of people with a disability;
- Developing and implementing a range of responses which reflect the expressed needs and priorities of local people with a disability, across all areas of community life.

Local workers have a role in supporting community awareness, advocacy and leadership by people with a disability. Their activities can involve a range of community infrastructure including the built environment, transport, and information and communication technology. It covers all life stages of people with a disability, and recognises the cultural diversity of people with a disability, including indigenous people. Local workers work with a range of services which people with a disability require in order to be fully included in the community, including disability supports, education, training, employment and health. It also includes those activities which further contribute to health and wellbeing such as the arts, festivals, sport, recreation and tourism.

Better planning

The Community Building Program draws heavily on the Integrated Local Area Planning model developed by the Australian Local Government Association in 1993, which takes an holistic view of communities and an integrated approach to planning. Local workers support people with a disability to contribute to a range of council- and community-led planning processes. Their goal is to ensure the needs of people with a disability are taken into account in community planning. Often an additional outcome of enhanced skills and confidence for both the people with a disability and the other community members is also achieved through the process.

Creating transport solutions in Wellington and East Gippsland

Transport issues are complex in the isolated areas of Gippsland, and many people with a disability in Gippsland have powerful stories to share about their lack of access to transport. The local RuralAccess worker has brought those people together with local government, state government, transport providers and community organisations. Together they developed solutions to local transport issues, resulting in improved services for the general public as well as improved access to transport for people with a disability. Some of the people with a disability involved in these planning processes say they now feel more skilled and confident in participating in community planning and projects.

Stronger partnerships

RuralAccess, MetroAccess and deafaccess workers build partnerships with and between local disability services, community organisations, business, community members, and various government bodies. A key aim for developing enduring partnerships is to promote longer term collaboration and improved community capacity, beyond the life of any particular project or activity. Successful partnerships involve a willingness to try new approaches and new ways of understanding from a different perspective. Planning for the inclusion of people with a disability requires a commitment to this style of partnership.

One and All Festival: Arts, Sport and Culture in Victoria's South-West

The One and All Festival is an annual community arts, sporting and cultural festival that aims to inform people about the issues affecting people with a disability whilst showcasing the talents and involvement of people with a disability to local communities. The festival, which has been running since 2001, includes a two-week program of events involving communities across the City of Warrnambool and the Shires of Southern Grampians, Glenelg, Moyne and Corangamite. The One and All Festival is guided by a collaborative steering committee which includes community members and representatives from local government and community organisations. The RuralAccess and deafaccess workers are an integral part of the organising committee and work to ensure this festival continues to grow.

Creative projects

Local workers plan and develop projects across the full range of their local community's infrastructure and activity. A key goal of the projects is to increase opportunities for people with a disability to become involved with their local communities. Projects are designed to address local issues and priorities emerging from mapping and planning strategies and are based on partnership approaches. Projects vary in scope with some very small scale initiatives, whilst others are major projects with a long term outcomes and multiple partners involved.

Talking Taxis

Some people with a disability have difficulty communicating with taxi drivers, which in turn affects their confidence and independence. In the City of Maribyrnong the MetroAccess worker brought together local disability support services, taxi drivers, specialist communication services and the Victorian Taxi Directorate, to develop some simple tools to improve communication in taxis. The Picture Boards contain pictures and phrases commonly used in taxis which drivers and passengers can point to in order to communicate. The Personal Journey Cards are designed to be filled in prior to a journey to give details about destination, preferred route and payment. Local people in Maribyrnong developed, trialled and improved the tools. The feedback from the trials was so positive that the Victorian Taxi Directorate decided to make the tools available to all people in Victoria.

A full description of a range of projects can be found on the Disability Services website.

Next steps

An evaluation of RuralAccess was conducted in 2005. The evaluation measured the impact of RuralAccess across four key variables – access; involvement and participation; community awareness and community acceptance. The evaluation data indicated strong evidence of positive change across all variables, with RuralAccess well placed as a resource for establishing, developing and maintaining planning and project partnerships in regional Victoria. The findings of the RuralAccess evaluation have informed the further development of the Community Building Program as a whole and contributed to the next steps for the program.

Strengthen and support the Community Building Program

Disability Services will develop a set of documents to guide the work of RuralAccess, MetroAccess and deafaccess that includes:

- Operational guidelines – a single set of guidelines which reflect current operations.
- Practice framework – a guide for community building practice and a framework for consistency and rigour across the program.

Disability Services will further refine the evaluation and reporting requirements of the program in order to strengthen the usefulness of information collected, reduce duplicated reporting processes and demonstrate the progress of the program through change in local communities. This will include a review of the Community Building Project and Achievement Reporting System (CBPARS).

Disability Services will continue to develop and implement a multi-level promotional campaign to demonstrate progress and achievements of the Community Building Program.

These will be progressively developed over the next twelve months in order to be fully implemented in the 2010/11 financial year.

Disability Services will continue to support the professional development of local workers, in partnership with their auspice organisations, to ensure workforce development which supports strong community building practice in the contemporary disability policy context. In 2009-10 Disability Services will collaborate with the regional and local workers to develop a calendar of professional development opportunities, including Community Building Forums, regional networks and peer meetings.

Support service reorientation

Disability Services will identify and profile areas where the Community Building Program has developed a partnership approach with disability support services and will assist in strengthening and extending those partnerships.

In 2009-10 the service reorientation priorities of the Community Building Program will be to support initiatives including:

- Reorientation of day services
- Reshaping transition support
- Increasing access to disability services by Aboriginal people

in order to ensure positive outcomes for people with a disability as they participate in new initiatives in their local communities.

Strengthen partnerships

Disability Services will take leadership in maintaining relationships with relevant strategic partners in state and local government to ensure a strong understanding of the Community Building Program and best use of the resources of the program. In 2009-10 the focus will be:

- The Office for Disability and a partnership project that aims to explore the links between self-directed planning and community planning processes;
- Local government through the Municipal Association of Victoria;
- Neighbourhood Renewal and the Whole of Government Implementation Plan.

Other partnerships will be pursued as relevant opportunities arise.

Conclusion

The Community Building Program is well-placed to draw on the expertise and knowledge of disability support providers and to facilitate partnerships between the disability sector and local communities. The program also complements and adds value to the direct service work of disability support services by targeting communities and building readiness in mainstream providers to support people with a disability and their families.

Disability Services will maintain and strengthen the Community Building Program to ensure that local communities in Victoria continue to embrace the diversity of local people and become more welcoming and inclusive of people with a disability.

