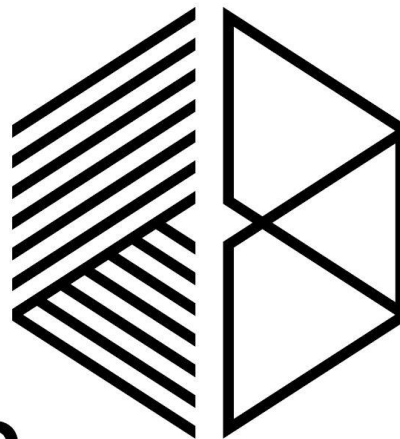


GEELONG REGIONAL LIBRARIES



Geelong Regional Libraries Draft Access and Inclusion Plan 2018-2022

Why have Geelong Regional Libraries created this draft plan?

One in five people in Australia have a disability (18.4% of the Victorian population). Most Australians have some experience of disability – whether it is our self, a family member, friend, someone that we work with or people that we interact with everyday. This includes people who visit any one of Geelong Regional Libraries 16 branches, contact the library by phone, email or use the mobile lending service.

‘I want every person to come into one of our libraries and think ‘this library is for me’, Manager, Geelong Regional Libraries

Geelong Regional Libraries have chosen to develop a plan not just because it is the right thing to do, but because we want all people to feel that our libraries are ‘for them’ – a place where

you can visit and be included, feel welcome and work with us if you have the skills that we require.

This Plan has been prepared by the Australian Federation of Disability Organisations (AFDO). Geelong Regional Libraries have been working with AFDO's Diversity Field Officer Service over the last three years, with a focus on becoming a more welcoming, confident and accessible business and workplace for people with disability and build on the work that we have completed to date. A series of recommendations, most of which have been included in this report, were provided to Geelong Regional Libraries by the AFDO Diversity Field Officer Service. These recommendations covered physical access improvements as well as other forms of accessibility for a wide range of people with disability, customer service and a particular focus on enhancing our workplace to increase the diversity of our staff, including skilled candidates with disability.

The key with any Access and Inclusion Plan is the ability to implement it. We don't want this Plan to sit in a drawer – it is AFDO's view, and our view, that it is much better to have a more targeted list of actions that can be implemented, then a much more ambitious list that is unable to be fully achieved. To ensure that we achieve what we set out, this Plan includes a list of actions that we think are achievable by 2022. We want to work in partnership with our communities to make sure that we can bring these recommendations to life and continue to build a more welcoming and confident library network.

How does this plan fit in with our strategic vision for Geelong Regional Libraries?

Perfectly. Geelong Regional Libraries' mission is 'to be an exemplary library service. We will create opportunities for our community to read, learn, work and connect with each other and the world

- By providing safe, welcoming and inclusive places and spaces
- By facilitating equitable access to collections, programs, information and technology;
- By nurturing discovery, creativity and innovation;
- Through the knowledge, expertise and encouragement of library staff.

This Plan not only aligns with our Strategic Plan but also builds on our previous Disability Access and Inclusion Plan 2010-13 and our work with AFDO over the last three years which has included recruitment of people with disability, improvements to access and changes in our policies and practices.

We don't want the improvements that are made as part of implementing this Plan to be stand alone, but rather to be part of our broader vision that we have just outlined.

How has this Plan been developed?

The Australian Federation of Disability Organisations is a national peak body run by and for people with disability. AFDO's board, through its constitution, must be a majority of people with disability. A majority of AFDO's staff have personal or lived experience of disability.

AFDO's members are organisations that are also run by and for people with disability, bringing the experience of people who are Deaf, hard of hearing, people who are blind or vision impaired, and people who are Deafblind; people with physical disability and brain injury; people with an intellectual disability, including Down syndrome; people with autism; organisations representing women with disabilities and organisations working alongside people with disability to advocate their needs.

This experience, and AFDO's own knowledge of the barriers that impact participation in everyday life and in gaining and keeping employment and how these can be remedied, have informed this Plan.

To ensure that the Plan has been informed from more than just this experience, sessions were held with

- The Executive Management team of Geelong Regional Libraries to understand the vision for Geelong Regional Libraries, what is currently offered to library visitors and in particular to people with disability, what currently works and what could be improved.
- A session with people with disability, their families and other interested stakeholders, exploring what currently works, what could be improved, customer service, accessibility and increasing employment opportunities. A further two sessions were scheduled but were cancelled due to insufficient public interest.
- A session for service providers working with people with disability. This session explored the same questions as those in the session for people with disability.

- 2 x sessions with senior Geelong Regional Libraries staff to explore accessibility of library venues and practical improvements that can increase access for people with disability, with guidance of what to look out for at other libraries through the Geelong Regional Library network.
- SurveyMonkey survey open to the public to gather feedback on how the experience of people with disability can be improved across the Geelong Regional Library network. This survey was open for six weeks, with 440 respondents completing the survey. Seventy two (72%) percent of people who responded were female, with 57% of respondents over 60 years of age. Seventy eight (78%) percent of respondents had completed a Certificate IV or higher. Of those who have a disability, 21% shared that they had a physical disability, followed by autism, mental health conditions and sensory disabilities. Twenty-three (23%) percent preferred not to say.

Overview of the Plan

This Plan has three key areas of focus:

1. Promote what Geelong Regional Libraries already do

1.1 Promote

1.2 Reach out – community engagement

2. Build on what Geelong Regional Libraries already do

2.1 Customer service

2.2 Accessibility of libraries

2.3 Resources

2.4 Programs

2.5 Attracting the future workforce

2.6 Retaining staff who may acquire a disability

3. Review and engage

Action! Key areas for Geelong Regional Libraries for 2018-2022

1. Promote what Geelong Regional Libraries already do

Geelong Regional Libraries held 6,255 programs, events and workshops during 2016/17, attended by 149,815, a 10% increase from the last year. These programs and events are open to any library visitor to attend. Geelong Regional Libraries also has specific resources for people with disability, ranging from audio books, to captioned and audio described DVDs, a new braille embosser at Geelong library, large print keyboards and screen reading and magnification software for people who are blind or vision impaired.

Promote

While there is a wealth of resources, knowledge of what is available could be improved, not just for library visitors, but also internally among staff and management.

‘Most things [the library currently does well] but I had no idea there even where Auslan books available! Maybe more publicity around what resources are available for people with disabilities and their parents’.

a) Develop a communication strategy to increase awareness of:

- **New programs that have been developed, existing programs and upcoming programs and events**

- **Events that might be of interest to particular groups (such as parents of young children, parents of older children, CALD, indigenous, professionals, over 55s and people with disability who may fall into any of these categories) to enable these to be promoted at a branch level**
- **How to meet access needs, profiling different forms of accessibility, how it works and how it can be organised (such as live captioning). This could be supported with a series of ‘how-to’ factsheets. Examples include how to organise Auslan interpreters, using the National Relay Service, how to communicate with people with disability including preferred terms and language, providing sighted guide assistance and specific insights into different types of disability and accessibility.**

This could be communicated through regular updates through the Geelong Regional Libraries intranet, weekly or bi-monthly emails to all staff of upcoming key activities and profiling activities and information as well as utilising existing communication strategies.

- b) Develop a communication strategy (external for library visitors) to increase awareness of new, existing and upcoming programs and events. This should include**
- **Information via social media and Geelong Regional Libraries website**
 - **Large print event information (16+ font in san-serif font such as Arial) available online and in branches. Braille information available on request**
 - **Information shared by staff with library patrons in conversation (where appropriate)**

- **Exploration of the potential of an additional email subscription option to receive information about upcoming events**
- **An update of library software to enable people to advise preferred information formats and accessibility requirements to enable information to be customised**
- **Promotion of sessions that are accessible (where accessibility has already been organised such as a hearing loop) or that access needs can be met on request (ie. Auslan interpreters can be booked when it is requested). Include accessibility symbols where access is guaranteed to be provided – for example the wheelchair access symbol where the event will be held in an accessible room.**
- **Development of ‘how-to’s to use resources should also be explored (eg. location of mobility charging points, how to access the hearing loop and how equipment can be used, such as the braille embosser, CCTV etc).**

c) We make informed choices through good information. Provide key information about events to enable people to make an informed choice which could include:

- **whether the venue is physically accessible – wide, flat/ramped and obstacle free entry and exit into the building and meeting area**
- **whether there are toilets in the building, including an accessible toilet;**
- **the floor where the event will be held (particularly in multi-level buildings with lifts);**
- **whether there will be a break and refreshments;**
- **length of the event;**

- **maximum number of attendees;**
- **RSVP date and statement that accessibility needs can be met such as ‘Let us know if you have any accessibility requirements when you RSVP’;**
- **whether this will be in a well-lit environment;**
- **whether meet and greet is possible for attendees new to the library of site; and**
- **whether the event is child friendly.**

This type of information can help people with disability and their families to determine whether the event will be accessible to meet their own specific needs (such as anxiety, sensory processing disabilities, physical access or other disability related needs).

Reach out – community engagement

Geelong Regional Libraries has a strong connection with the community and a wide range of organisations. We recommend that this continues with a focus to increased engagement with organisations representing and working with students and people with disability.

a) Review Geelong Regional Libraries current engagement strategy to

- **Reach out to local schools with students with disability to provide opportunities for students to learn more about the library, with exploration of customised sessions for students to gain new skills and experience (such as trialing virtual reality equipment in smaller group settings with smaller staff to students ratios)**

- **Reach out to community groups – this presents an opportunity for library staff to learn more about the day to day experiences of people with a particular type of disability, exchange ideas and for visitors to learn more about what the library can offer across its suite of programs, events and resources.**

2. Build on what Geelong Regional Libraries already do

2.1 Customer service

‘I am totally blind and there is always help if I need it’.

Ninety two (92%) percent of people who completed the Survey Monkey survey felt that staff ‘provide useful assistance’ and 89% stated that staff ‘go out of their way to be of help’.

‘My husband has young onset Alzheimer’s and we often visit the library together. Me to borrow books and him to wander around. Always welcomed by the lovely staff’.

Some people felt that this could be improved, with 69% reporting that staff appear ‘very confident’ or ‘confident’ when helping a person with disability. Increased awareness of disability, including ‘hidden’ disabilities was raised as an area of interest for both staff and library visitors with a disability.

a) Engage with organisations run by and for people with disability, or organisations that employ trainers with disability, to increase learning and confidence about different types of disability (4-5 sessions per year). This could take the form of ‘conversation hours’ which may be more informal and seeks to build mutual understanding and connection, or as disability awareness training. Engagement with organisations and consumer groups should be remunerated. This should include less visible disabilities (such as Alzheimer’s, dyslexia etc) for all front line staff.

The benefits include broadening staff understanding about different types of disability, addressing different cultural views of disability, identifying preferred terms by people with disability and etiquette, addressing barriers and exposing common myths. Training should also be considered when staff with disability come on board as a new employee, volunteer or work experience so that the person feels welcome and supported.

The focus of this Plan is to create spaces that are more welcoming and inclusive to everyone. Feedback from the survey and stakeholder sessions, as well as AFDO's engagement with people with disability, recognise that some people with disability may feel more comfortable disclosing their disability and disability related needs to people who have their own experience of a disability, have lived experience (as a family member or carer), or someone who is more familiar or confident with disability through experience working with people with disability.

'The Geelong library is lovely but it is a bit intimidating even though it is light and bright and an effort has clearly been made to provide comfortable chairs etc. Because of it's generous proportions it still feels like a 'sacred space'. If I had an introduction I am sure I would feel more welcome. As it is I don't really understand what is where. Staff tend to be gathered around the computer terminals and do not acknowledge people who walk in. It is a bit hard to tell if they are busy so I have been unwilling to interrupt their conversation. They have been removed from behind a desk but have not really embraced the more welcoming ethos. I felt I knew what to do in an old style library. I had a right to go up to a counter and

ask questions. I haven't raised this issue with staff - already uncertain what is OK to ask. As a result I still don't really know where to find things I might be interested in but I have enjoyed sitting in the sun in a comfy chair reading the paper'.

This is not about putting the responsibility of being welcoming on to one staff member, or on to volunteers, but listening to the feedback from people with disability and families who would like to have one or two nominated points of contact, such as a peer worker, who can

- answer questions about activities and accessibility
- introduce the library visitor to staff who can assist to teach new skills (such as using an iPad) or have a tour of the library and its resources
- help find resources of interest
- listen and have an anonymous conversation, and
- be a point of contact to raise issues and have these issues addressed.

The peer worker can also share their own experience of disability and insights where it is relevant and helpful.

b) Explore the provision of a peer worker at each library branch, drawing on existing staff who are interested in taking on the role and have experience and confidence working with people with disability to act as a contact point for people with disability and their families during nominated hours.

- c) Identify people with disability who are interested in becoming a peer worker as a volunteer or remunerated position (based on the person's preference).**
- d) The names of peer workers, their hours of availability by branch and how they can be contacted should be promoted via Geelong Regional Libraries website and newsletters, with a periodic update showcasing an issue that has been raised (anonymously) to build confidence that issues are listened to and actioned.**
- e) Update details and introduce new peer workers as staff and volunteers/contractors change.**

Some library visitors with disability have additional support needs and may not always attend a library with a support worker or carer. This can include assistance with toileting, feeding and addressing other needs that can come with the experience of a disability. Some of these needs require specialist knowledge and training, and if done incorrectly, can cause harm and distress. To maximise the participation and inclusion of people with greater support needs, it is recommended

- f) A partnership is explored with a local service provider agency/s trained to provide support assistance, with the view of dedicated support times across the library network, commencing with three sites.**
- g) Review communication accessibility, including low technology solutions, such as communication boards on an iPad, to increase confidence and communication between people with communication difficulties and staff.**

2.2 Accessibility of library premises

A number of areas of improvement were identified by library patrons for improvement that are just as relevant to library patrons without a disability. This included an increase in library hours at some branches, more car parking (including accessible and close car parking), improved access to the library from the car park, the availability of toilets (including having toilets available inside a library and accessible toilets), quieter spaces, both inside and outside of libraries, and outdoor shelter to wait for car or taxi pickups.

‘Now I use a small disability scooter it is easy to get around, but cannot access higher shelves nor book books out unless I have a companion with me. Am much closer to the new library being built in Leopold but am worried I will not have access when finally built’.

- a) **Ensure an Accredited Access Consultant is engaged to review all proposed new works/plans for library buildings prior to sign off for construction, with a view to implementing universal access design principles (access above legislated requirements).**

- b) **Conduct accessibility checks of current premises throughout the Geelong Regional Library network to identify where improvements can be made within capital expenditure budgets, including the Geelong Heritage Centre and Library. Create a priority list of premises for retrofit, with a focus on introducing accessible toilets, where space allows and retrofitting existing toilets with features (handrails, hoists) where space allows.**

- c) Accessibility checks should specifically consider:**
- **Greater availability of well contrasted signage in plain language with large sans-serif fonts and upper and lower case**
 - **More accessible, navigational signage and wayfinding information to locate resources and information**
 - **Gradient of ramps (carpark and entry) and shorelines to be reviewed that can be used to orient to the building**
 - **Clear, continuous and accessible path of travel to the entry, with wide entry and egress into libraries to enable independent use. This includes review of doors and doorways (such as checking the weight of doors and replacing heavy doors with automatic doors where space allows)**
 - **Wide aisles to enable independent access**
 - **Step free staff access**
 - **Accessible height book return chutes**
 - **Circulation space around computer terminals that are height appropriate to be able to be used by people using wheelchairs or a mobility aid and provide privacy from passer-bys. Space to place items near a computer.**
 - **Range of seating, with and without arms**
 - **Circulation space to move around, including placement of furniture**
 - **Provision of continuous handrails**
 - **Books available on shelves that can be reached by everyone (books on the bottom shelves are hard to reach for people who are older and people with some disabilities)**

- **Lighting to enable people to get around independently and read signage (no pooling and minimise glare)**
- **Meeting rooms are accessible, with adjustable desks to enable people using wheelchairs to roll in**
- **Accessible height drinking fountains**
- **Provision of tactile ground surface indicators that meet luminance contrast and contrast strips on stairs**
- **Clear panes of glass have a luminance contrast strip**
- **Lifts (for multi level buildings) are clearly signed, with well contrasted and height appropriate buttons with raised tactile and braille. Lifts provide audible information. Signage provided in the lift uses large print and is well contrasted.**
- **Review accessibility of mobile library service bus (currently has steps) and other lending options.**
- **Review emergency evacuation procedures to ensure accessibility at all branches**

d) Review parking, in particular accessible parking for people requiring wider bays with circulation space (such as people using wheelchairs) and people requiring greater space than a regular carpark spot (people with limited mobility) across the regional network, with the view of increasing accessible parking through collaboration with GRLC member councils. Where accessible parking cannot be increased due to limited space, review and promote accessible options to engage with the library.

One in 100-110 people in Australia have autism spectrum disorder.¹ Libraries, which have been traditionally known as quiet spaces, are now becoming more interactive and collaborative, as demonstrated through the vast amount of programs throughout the Geelong Regional Library network. Some libraries are in growth areas, such as Geelong West, which place significant demand on a smaller library.

Using spaces creatively, which take into account interaction with others, fun and play as well as quieter spaces to explore ideas, rest and enjoy tasks, is an important consideration for the future.

e) Explore re-purposing of meeting rooms, where space allows, to a 'quiet room' with stations for different activities (computer with learning or games, headsets, Lego etc) available on a nominated day/s and time/s for children and a similar or different set up for adults at different nominate day/s or time/s. Conduct a trial and promote.

f) Explore a sensory hour at each library. Hours can vary between libraries to provide an opportunity for people to benefit within and outside of business hours.

'Colac library has a games/sensory room. It would benefit my young clients if they were able to assess this facility as i often find that the room is locked when i visit . My young clients all are on the spectrum for various disabilities and come from broken homes usually trauma based. A few yrs ago while working with a local play

¹ Source: www.amaze.org.au/discover/about-autism-spectrum-disorder/what-is-an-autism-spectrum-disorder/

group a person from Geelong library came out and rehomed old library books. I've tried to contact various library's to see if this service still exists but to no avail. My clients don't have access to books and I know that old books could transport them away from their trauma.... and find magic again!'

2.3 Resources

Respondents to the survey shared a high level of satisfaction with the range of resources made available through the Geelong Regional Library network. Looking at the resources available to people with disability specifically

- 47% of people valued large print resources or found them 'moderately valuable'
- 46% audio books
- 32% e-books
- 71% CDs and DVDs, with 30% valuing audio described and captioned CDs and DVDs
- 62% computers and internet
- 22% for easy readers.

As with anything, there is always room for improvement.

- a) Promote resource collections to groups and organisations in the GRLC service region to ensure greater take up and knowledge of collections.**
- b) Review and update the register of disability service providers, local consumer and family led organisations, local schools and local government access workers to maximise reach.**

- c) Increase selection of audio books to benefit library visitors, including older library visitors who are less confident with e-books/e-audio books.**
- d) Invest in age appropriate easy-read materials for young adults and adults, which include materials for people with low vocabulary (fiction and non fiction), easy English or easy to read formats, well illustrated materials and materials with pictograms.**
- e) Review existing collections to determine how collections can be extended to people with disability. For example, the English as a Second Language collection has been designed to use simpler language to encourage reading that could be promoted to people with dyslexia, other learning disabilities and people with intellectual disability.**
- f) Review website and digital accessibility of the Geelong Regional Libraries website and intranet to ensure that this meets WCAG accessibility, including use via a mobile device. Provide materials online in text format (large print 16+ font) in addition to PDF formats, with a preference to HTML information.**

2.4 Programs

Geelong Regional Libraries currently offers early literacy programs, digital literacy programs for adults, lifelong learning programs, outreach to schools and adult learning centres and other community institutions. One program that is particularly inclusive is the 'Free accessibility Apps to use with your iPad'

that assists library visitors to grow their awareness to Apps like 'Text to Speech', 'Verbally', 'Magnificent', 'Access Note' and 'aDyslexia'.

With the rollout of the NDIS, we recommend that Geelong Regional Libraries network consider other accessible training that can be offered to library patrons, and how users with disability can be involved in delivering training, such as use of accessible Apps or information sessions on a range of issues including disability. This opportunity also lends itself to employment opportunities.

- a) Engage and recruit trainers and speakers with a disability for cultural events, workshops and events to mainstream the experience and skills of people with disability within the community.**

This will build confidence of staff and the community.

2.5 Attracting the future workforce - recruitment

To ensure that all possible applicants are reached when recruiting,

- a) refine the wording of job advertisements and position descriptions to encourage skilled candidates with disability to apply. Include this wording on the Geelong Regional Libraries website and on social media.**
- b) advise that reasonable adjustments are available during the interview process.**

- c) explore expanding the use of a Guaranteed Interview Approach. Securing a job interview can be a significant barrier for people with disability who disclose during the application process. A guaranteed interview approach is the commitment to interview candidates with a disability who meet the selection criteria (this does not preclude people with disability meeting the criteria and making interview on their own merit). This provides the opportunity for the candidate to address how they would perform the role, particularly as people with disability may have a more limited work history due to difficulty gaining employment opportunities. It also minimises unconscious bias during selection.**

- d) Provide more flexibility within the recruitment process to enable skilled candidates to demonstrate their competency outside of traditional interview processes. This could include video resumes displaying skills and attributes, work trials and exploring ‘place and train’ customised employment or job carving.**

- e) Work Experience and Traineeships - Geelong Regional Library Corporation has a strong positive history in this area, with 10 students undertaking work experience each year in the Library’s tertiary placement service. This intake process could be readily extended to young people with disability, standing out as an excellent environment and opportunity to start a career (1-2 placements per year).**

2.6 Retention

Most disability is acquired – this means that the disability has occurred later in life through accident, trauma, injury or developing a condition. With one in five people experiencing a disability, it is very likely that existing staff may already have, or will acquire a disability or experiencing a mental health condition during their career with Geelong Regional Libraries.

- a) **Continue to roll out Mental Health First Aid Training for managers and at 1-2 front line staff at each location, with periodic refresher training. Engage with consumer organisations that have people with lived experience of mental illness as part of the early outlined ‘conversations hours’ or disability awareness training. This can help reduce stigma around mental health and grow awareness in how to communicate with employees, colleagues and library visitors.**

- b) **Promote Geelong Regional Libraries’ Employment Assistance Program to staff to ensure uptake. An EAP is a confidential counselling service for employees who are experiencing difficulties that impact their wellbeing.**

- c) **Continue to conduct an annual health and wellbeing check. This is a good opportunity to gain insights into how Geelong Regional Libraries is tracking in the employment of people with disability, how included people feel, and whether adjustments are being provided when requested.**

d) Promote Geelong Regional Libraries as a welcoming place to work to encourage disclosure of disability.

3. Engage, review and refine

There are five recommendations to ensure that the Plan is successfully implemented.

a) Develop clear processes to systematically implement, monitor and evaluate the implementation of the Access and Inclusion Plan on an ongoing basis.

b) Share Geelong Regional Libraries commitment to inclusion with staff – this is important not just for library visitors, but also for employees to understand commitment within the workplace. Provide information, communicated in newsletters, intranet and team meetings, to Geelong Regional Libraries staff about the Access and Inclusion Plan, with periodic updates on how the Plan is being implemented and upcoming priorities.

A professional development day has been organised for October 2018 to discuss the actions in this Plan and increase Geelong Regional Libraries commitment.

- c) Engage with people with disability and representative organisations as this plan is rolled out to ensure collaboration and input to service planning and developments to improve access and inclusion across the library network.**

- d) Conduct a survey of people with disability every two years to assess the improvements that have been made, whether people with disability are experiencing greater inclusion, and to gain insights into emerging issues experienced by library visitors with a disability and their families.**

- e) Report on progress in each Annual Report to embed the Plan as part of the organisation’s strategic approach.**

The Access and Inclusion Plan represents a whole of organisation commitment to improving the welcoming nature of our libraries for all people in our communities. We welcome your thoughts on this plan.

Tell us what you think!

This Plan is currently in draft form. We are interested to know to what you think about the Plan. Does it hit the mark? Are there things that are important that have not been included? What parts of the Plan do you like?

We would like to receive your feedback – so email us at office@afdo.org.au with the subject 'Geelong Regional Libraries feedback' by **Friday 31 August 2018 at 5.00pm**.

You can provide your responses as dot points in an email. For organisations, there is no need for a submission as we appreciate that this takes a lot of time to prepare, so your thoughts via email are more than fine.

You can also leave your feedback in person at your local library and this will be passed on. Just make sure to let the staff member know that this relates to **the draft Access and Inclusion Plan**.

The final Plan will include an additional section with a summary of the recommendations, timeframe for implementation and who will be responsible.

Details

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