

CREATING PATHWAYS

INSIGHTS ON SUPPORT FOR ARTISTS WITH DISABILITY

September 2018



The Australia Council for the Arts respects Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and cultures. Readers should be aware that this report may contain references to and images of members of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community who have passed away.

The words 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander', 'First Nations' and 'Indigenous' are used interchangeably in this report to refer to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of Australia, and their arts and cultures.

ISBN

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This summary brings together a range of sources of research and evaluation undertaken by the Australia Council, including work done by external consultants.

The Council would like to thank and acknowledge the following consultants for their contributions:

- *Inside Policy* for work undertaken on qualitative research for the evaluation of the Arts and Disability funding initiative, and the review of Arts and Disability literature.
- *Patternmakers* for research on the evaluation of the Sync Leadership program.
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Every Australian should be able to experience the transformative power of art and participate in the cultural life of the nation, no matter where they live, what language they speak, their life stage, or circumstances.

The Australia Council believes that Australia's diversity is a great cultural asset. We recognise artists with disability as vital contributors to Australia's arts and culture. Disability in the arts offers excellence and artistry, as well as unique perspectives and lived experiences that challenge and redefine aesthetics. Artists with disability contribute layers of powerful expression, creativity and storytelling. Their work engenders dialogue, empathy and understanding, and can shift perceptions of disability through authentic insights. Disability in the arts is about the potential of art to change lives.

The Australia Council has a longstanding commitment to access and inclusion, and fostering representation and diversity in the arts. We recognise the barriers and inequities in society that impact on arts practice and participation, including for people with disability.

The Council has a legislative mandate to support art that reflects the diversity of Australia. This mandate is central to our national leadership role fostering excellence in the arts and increasing national and international engagement with Australian arts and artists.

Support for artists with disability is embedded across all Australia Council programs and initiatives and in our Strategic Plan, Corporate Plan, Disability Action Plan (DAP) and Cultural Engagement Framework (CEF). Our current DAP (2017-19) builds on and extends a more than 20 year commitment to arts and disability. It also has a much greater emphasis than previous DAPs on the intersections between disability and diversity, particularly across the Council's other CEF priority areas: First Nations peoples, children and young people, cultural and linguistic diversity, regional and remote Australia, and older people. In 2018 the Australia Council launched a new Reconciliation Action Plan that recognises this connection, including the significantly higher rates of disability experienced by First Nations Australians.

This report brings together findings and insights from a range of research undertaken in 2017-18 to inform the Council's approach to future support for artists with disability.

THIS REPORT PRESENTS:

- **Results of the evaluation of the Sync Leadership program (2014–15).** This comprised: interviews with selected program participants; facilitators and industry representatives; focus groups with program participants; and an online survey of program participants.
- **Results of the evaluation of the Arts and Disability funding initiative (2014–17).** This comprised focus groups and interviews with: artists with disability; peer assessors involved with the Arts and Disability initiative; Australia Council staff; state and territory arts agencies; organisations providing auspice support to artists with disability;¹ and analysis of Australia Council funding data.

KEY INSIGHTS INCLUDE:

Artists with disability create great art that is being recognised.

There is evidence of the impacts and benefits of work by artists with disability.

Artists with disability are a wide and diverse group. Their opportunities and barriers to create, work, and participate in the arts are complex and varied.

Agency and ownership are critical.

Visible success stories, role models and mentors are key to building opportunities and leadership.

The results of these evaluations are contextualised with insights drawn from wider literature and research about artists with disability and contemporary arts practice, including a case study and examples that bring these insights to life. These insights highlight the nuanced, intersecting and evolving factors impacting people with disability in the arts.

¹ The Arts and Disability funding evaluation included: focus groups and interviews with applicants, grant recipients, peer assessors and Australia Council staff. These were conducted by consultant Inside Policy. The Australia Council also conducted focus group research with state and territory arts agencies, organisations that auspiced grant applicants, and peer assessors. Findings are referred to throughout the report as qualitative research, or with reference to specific participant or stakeholder groups.



Martin Armstead
performing, Incite Arts,
UNBROKEN LAND 2016.
Credit: Oliver Eclipse.

Key outcomes for participants of the Sync Leadership program included time to reflect, innovate and navigate leadership challenges; and establishment of valuable peer networks. Many have since taken on more senior opportunities. Challenges noted included securing paid work at the right level, and having influence across the arts sector.

Over the life of the Arts and Disability funding initiative, progress was made towards its key goals. This included increasing the number of artists with disability interacting with the Australia Council, with two in three applications coming from first-time applicants. It also saw some artists with disability moving away from general funding programs.

The Arts and Disability funding initiative also resulted in increased opportunities and recognition of high quality work. The qualitative research identified growth in the volume, ambition and visibility of works by artists with disability. Successful applicants noted a range of positive impacts resulting from their projects, including: expanded reach and audience for their works (e.g. through tours or exhibitions); positive engagement with audiences and communities, both with and without disability; and improved perceptions of art made by artists with disability by audiences, and across the arts sector.

Artists with disability, and access and inclusion in the arts, remain priorities for the Council. We recognise that our contribution in this area is part of a much wider ecology. We share these insights in anticipation of a forthcoming national consultation being led by the Department of Communications and the Arts to renew the National Arts and Disability Strategy in 2019. Our findings will add to the body of evidence, including forthcoming research from the Department of Communications and the Arts.

INTRODUCTION

Since its inception the Australia Council has supported arts and disability, including many memorable projects and initiatives. Companies, such as Restless Dance Company and Back to Back Theatre began and continue their significant contributions to Australian cultural life with Australia Council support.

The Australia Council first put a Disability Action Plan (DAP) in place more than 20 years ago. Our current DAP (2017-19) builds on the work of the previous DAP (2014-16), which delivered: accessibility changes to systems, processes and communications across all Council programs and services; an initiative for arts leaders with disability in 2014-2015; and an Arts and Disability funding pilot in 2014. The Council made a subsequent commitment to extend the funding initiative with an investment of \$1 million over three years from 2015 to 2017.

Our DAP continues to extend the Council's work to deliver for people with disability across three goals of accessibility, leadership and arts practice.

In addition to our DAP, support for artists with disability is legislated in *The Australia Council Act 2013*, through the Council's role to support art that reflects the diversity of Australia. Support is embedded across all areas of work, guided by:

- The Council's *Strategic Plan: A Culturally Ambitious Nation (2014-2019)*, setting out goals to expand the reach of Australian arts, support great arts and artists, enrich the daily lives of all through art, and cherish Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts and cultures. Our current Strategic Plan incorporated reforms to funding decision-making processes to provide for greater diversity of peers in the assessment of grant applications, and implemented a new grants model to simplify the funding process for applicants.
- Stemming from the Council's Strategic Plan, the Corporate Plan articulates the Council's diversity commitments through the Cultural Engagement Framework (CEF). The CEF is the Council's overarching mechanism guiding diversity practices, strategies and decision-making. Disability is one of six current priority areas under the CEF, along with: First Nations peoples; children and young people; cultural diversity; older people; and regional and remote Australia.

This work by the Australia Council has not happened in isolation. It has intersected with activities of the Australian Government, state and territory arts agencies, arts and disability organisations and other entities within and beyond the arts sector. In 2009, the Council actively contributed to the development of the first National Arts and Disability Strategy, an agreement between the Australian, state and territory governments to work together to improve the opportunities and choices for people with disability to engage with and participate in the arts.

Since 2013 there have been large scale reforms across the disability, ageing and mental health sectors, with a move away from block funded service delivery to individual, user centric funding. The nature and scale of these reforms continues to unfold, presenting a wide range of opportunities and challenges for people with disability and the people and services they draw on.

The 2017 evaluation of the National Arts and Disability Strategy recognised the significant implications of these reforms on artists and the arts sector more broadly.² In February 2017 the Meeting of Cultural Ministers agreed to revisit and renew the Strategy for 2019, in consultation with arts and disability stakeholders.

People with disability continue to be under-represented among practising professional artists, and earn on average 42% less than their counterparts without disability.³ The 2016 National Inquiry into employment discrimination against older Australians and Australians with disability found widespread, ongoing and systemic discrimination in employment.⁴ Of particular relevance to practising professional artists – who predominantly undertake their creative work on a freelance or self-employed basis⁵ – are the findings pointing to the additional layers of complexity, barriers, and limitations in protection from discrimination for people with disability working as freelance and self-employed.

2 Meeting of Cultural Ministers 2017, *National Arts and Disability Strategy Evaluation Report 2013-15*, Commonwealth of Australia, <https://www.arts.gov.au/documents/national-arts-and-disability-strategy-evaluation-report-2013-2015>

3 David Throsby and Katya Petetskaya 2017, *Making Art Work: An Economic Study of Professional Artists in Australia*, Australia Council for the Arts, <http://www.australiacouncil.gov.au/research/making-art-work/>

4 Australian Human Rights Commission 2016, *Willing to Work: National Inquiry into Employment Discrimination against Older Australians and Australians with Disability*, Australian Human Rights Commission, <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/our-work/age-discrimination/projects/willing-work-national-inquiry-employment-discrimination-against>

5 David Throsby and Katya Petetskaya 2017, *Making Art Work: An Economic Study of Professional Artists in Australia*, Australia Council for the Arts, <http://www.australiacouncil.gov.au/research/making-art-work/>

OUR DEFINITION OF DISABILITY

‘Disability’ results from the interaction between persons with impairments, conditions or illnesses and the environmental and attitudinal barriers they face. Such impairments, conditions or illnesses may be permanent, temporary, intermittent or imputed, and include those that are physical, sensory, psychosocial, neurological, medical or intellectual.

UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 13 December 2006

The Social Model of disability distinguishes between the impairment of the person (the condition, illness or loss/lack of function) and disability (the barriers and discrimination created by society). These barriers are seen as the disabling factors which prevent or limit opportunities. They may take the form of attitudes, discrimination or the physical environment. Disability may be permanent or temporary, and is often not visible.

Mental health is included in this definition; however, not everyone who is diagnosed with a mental health condition identifies as having disability. A spotlight on mental illness in the Australian Bureau of Statistics National Health Survey in 2007-08 identified that of the 1.8 million people of working age with mental illness, less than half (43%) reported having disability.⁶

The term ‘disability’ can also include people who are deaf or hard of hearing. People from the Deaf community may not always identify as having disability or impairment, and may identify as part of a cultural and linguistic group with their first language being Auslan (Australian Sign Language).

⁶ Australian Bureau of Statistics 2012, ‘Disability And Work,’ *Australian Social Trends*, March Quarter 2012, <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/4102.0Main+Features40March+Quarter+2012>

AUSTRALIA COUNCIL SUPPORT FOR ARTISTS WITH DISABILITY

The Council's DAP has delivered a number of strategies targeted to disability, including: the Sync Leadership initiative (2014-15); an Arts and Disability funding initiative (2014-17); and a focus on increasing the number of peer assessors with disability. The Australia Council also continues to provide multi-year funding to a number of leading producing and service organisations working in the arts and disability field.

Evaluation of the Sync Leadership program and Arts and Disability funding initiative produced the following insights.

SYNC LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

The Sync Leadership program was delivered in 2014 and 2015 by the Australia Council in partnership with Arts Access Australia. It aimed to build the capacity of leaders within the arts and disability sector and grow a network of strong and resilient arts leaders with disability. Program presenters were the UK-based co-founders: Jo Verrent, artist, Senior Producer with *Unlimited* and consultant with disability; and Sarah Pickthall, consultant, coach, community producer and diversity engineer. The program paired leadership learning through a five-day residential and one-to-one coaching over a four month period.

- In 2014, 33 applications were received and 12 were successful (a 36% success rate).
- In 2015, 22 applications were received and 10 were successful (a 45% success rate). In addition, two participants from 2014 were invited to develop coaching skills with Sarah Pickthall, to embed these skills within the Australian sector.

RESULTS OF THE SYNC LEADERSHIP PROGRAM EVALUATION

- Participants reported that the program provided time and a safe space to reflect, spark new thinking and navigate their leadership challenges.
- Participants valued the peer networks that were established. Many have since taken on higher level leadership roles.
- Participants noted that arts and disability leadership is at an early stage of development and challenges remain, including securing paid work at the right level, and having influence across the arts sector.
- Learnings have been incorporated into broader leadership programs and initiatives at the Council, including the Arts Leaders and Future Leaders programs.

ARTS AND DISABILITY FUNDING INITIATIVE

The Australia Council delivered a pilot, one-off grant round in 2014, open to individuals and groups with disability. The pilot included targeted assessment criteria and new provisions to encourage and enable submission of applications in a range of accessible formats. In October 2014, the Council announced a further commitment of \$1 million over three years, and delivered the Arts and Disability initiative from 2015–17 as a dedicated funding initiative within the Council’s reformed core grants program.⁷

- Between 2014 and 2017, a total of 468 applications were submitted by individuals and groups (375 by individuals).
- Across the four years (including the pilot), 75 grants totalling \$1.4 million were approved (16% success rate).

RESULTS OF THE ARTS AND DISABILITY FUNDING INITIATIVE EVALUATION

Over the life of the Arts and Disability funding initiative, progress was made towards its key goals to:

Increase the number artists with disability interacting with the Australia Council and receiving support. Of the individuals applying to the initiative across the four years, 248 of the 375 (66%) applications were from first-time applicants to the Australia Council. Thirty of these applications were successful (12% success rate). Applicants who had previously applied to the Council had a higher success rate (25%). There were also some unintended consequences, notably some artists with disability were drawn away from general programs. During the four years of this initiative half (49%) of all applicants who had previously applied to the Council only applied to the Arts and Disability funding.

Increase opportunities for artists with disability to develop, present and promote their work, and support professional and skills development opportunities. The qualitative research identified growth in the volume, ambition and visibility of works by artists with disability. Support enabled artists to: create innovative, original and experimental work and explore new forms and practices; undertake professional development activities (such as engaging a mentor or study overseas), which benefited practice and career development; and travel, network and collaborate with others in their field of practice. Representatives from state and territory arts agencies identified a number of impacts they attributed, at least in part, to the funding program, including: an increase in the number of practising artists with disability establishing professional careers; and greater visibility of career pathways and notable achievements.



Back to Back Theatre, *Ganesh Versus the Third Reich*. Credit: Jeff Busby.

⁷ The Australia Council implemented major reforms to grants programs in 2015 during the life of the Arts and Disability funding initiative. In this report, ‘core grants program’ refers to the consolidated grant categories created in the reforms. For individuals and groups, these categories are: Arts Projects for Individuals and Groups, and Career Development Grants for Individuals and Groups from 2015. (Figures from the 2014 pilot and were derived from benchmarking of comparable, peer-assessed grants programs).



An Unlikely Tour, Crossroad Arts. Credit: Cherrie Hughes.

Increase the visibility of and audiences for practising artists with disability by investing in high quality projects and advocacy.

The qualitative research found that funding was beneficial in supporting high quality work by artists with disability. Successful applicants noted a range of positive impacts resulting from their projects, including: expanded reach and audience for their works (e.g. through tours or exhibitions); positive engagement with audiences and communities, both with and without disability; and improved perceptions of art made by artists with disability by audiences, and across the arts sector. State and territory agencies noted that the program has assisted the development of more visible public profiles, with artists creating more high profile work, collaborations and partnerships.

Embed learnings and improvements across all programs and services.

The qualitative research and an evaluation of the 2014-16 DAP⁸ identified a range of accessibility improvements implemented across the Council including: a range of accessible application formats; new policies, practices and capabilities such as disability awareness, Easy English and audio description. Since 2014, the Council's website has met AA accessibility standards (and in some cases AAA) of the web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG 2.0).⁹

⁸ Australia Council for the Arts 2016, *Disability Action Plan 2014-2016 Evaluation: Plain English Summary Report*, Australia Council for the Arts, <http://www.australiacouncil.gov.au/about/disability/>

⁹ The Australia Council website meets all W3C Priority 1 and Priority 2 checkpoints of WCAG 2.0. For more information see W3C Web Accessibility Initiative, <https://www.w3.org/WAI/>

FURTHER INSIGHTS FROM SYNC LEADERSHIP AND ARTS AND DISABILITY FUNDING EVALUATIONS

- The developments outlined above cannot be solely attributed to the Arts and Disability funding initiative. In the same period, the Australia Council undertook significant reforms to its structure, grants programs and peer assessment process. These reforms were accompanied by accessibility improvements across systems, processes and communications, and increased diversity among peer assessors. Also during this time – as participants in the evaluations have observed – discussion about the value and role of artists with disability has shifted, and access to funding and programs has increased across the arts ecology.
- Peer assessors and state and territory arts agencies observed that some population groups, including young people and those of culturally diverse background, were not as well represented across arts and disability programs and initiatives. This highlights the compounding effects of barriers already faced by people with disability. It was also noted that some artists with disability, in particular those with complex access needs, including those with intellectual or learning disabilities, face additional barriers that impact on pathways into arts practice and access to Australia Council support.
- Specific elements of the Arts and Disability funding initiative most valued by artists with disability were: the ability to budget for access requirements; peer assessors who understand the experience of disability; and accessibility features including the ability to submit applications in multiple formats. These are features of all Australia Council grants programs. However, some artists and sector partners were unaware of the range of access provisions, or that peers with disability and expertise are represented across assessment panels. The evaluations of both Arts and Disability funding and Sync Leadership initiatives confirmed the need for continued emphasis in the Council’s DAP on extending accessibility, engagement and communication with different groups of artists with disability.
- The Arts and Disability funding and Sync Leadership initiatives were developed to test and address specific issues identified within the Council’s 2014–16 DAP and to improve access. The evaluations emphasised the need to ensure artists with disability are able to compete for funding equitably and the need for initiatives that adapt to changing needs and wider policy settings. A dedicated funding program may not be the most effective model to respond to this shifting environment.

10 Prior, Y 2015, ‘Redefining the (Able) Body: Disabled Performers Make their Presence Felt at the Fringe,’ *The Conversation*, <http://theconversation.com/redefining-the-able-body-disabled-performers-make-their-presence-felt-at-the-fringe-47551>

11 Creed, C 2016, ‘Assistive Tools for Disability Arts: Collaborative Experiences in Working with Disabled Artists and Stakeholders’, *Journal of Assistive Technologies*, vol.10, Issue 2

12 Pratchett L, Hu R, Walsh M & Tuli S 2017, *The Knowledge City Index: A tale of 25 cities in Australia*. University of Canberra, Faculty of Business, Government and Law, Canberra.

Torok, S. and Holper, P 2017, *Securing Australia’s Future: Harnessing interdisciplinary research for innovation and prosperity*, Australian Council of Learned Academies, Melbourne, <https://acola.org.au/wp/saf-book/>

BROADER LEARNINGS

A range of themes and insights have emerged from the evaluations of the Sync Leadership and Arts and Disability funding initiatives, as well as other research and sector engagement activities over the past few years.

Artists with disability create great art that is being recognised.

Artists with disability are creating great art that pushes boundaries and opens new avenues of creative and aesthetic possibility. The quality of work by artists with disability is being recognised.

Artists with disability and their collaborators identify that the experience and perspective of disability brings a unique dimension to creative processes and artistic practice. Some suggest they are creating new aesthetics, concepts and forms informed by disability, particularly when disability and access considerations are embedded in the creative process from the outset.¹⁰ Peers involved in the assessment of grants have highlighted both the stimulation and challenge of grappling with artistry in areas of practice that are developing new forms, and where vocabularies do not yet exist to explain and fully understand the artistry involved.

Technological change holds both opportunities and challenges for artists with disability. Some artists are working with rapidly evolving assistive technologies – such as eye gaze tracking, motion tracking, speech recognition and facial expression switches – in ways that transform their own and other practices and push the application of these technologies.¹¹ Some are working with technologies such as virtual reality and augmented reality in new and expansive ways. Many of the same forces driving changes to these technologies are also at play in broader social and workforce disruption. A key element in predictions of a sustainable and liveable future is the need for a set of creative and social skills that prioritise the place of human creative capacity¹².



GAELE MELLIS

Access, aesthetics, innovation - *Take Up Thy Bed and Walk*

Gaelle Mellis' work *Take Up Thy Bed and Walk* is credited as Australia's first performance work incorporating aesthetic access, embedding the performer's physicality and communication styles – and those of potential audiences – at the centre of the creative process. The work integrated audio description, captioning, sign language and interactivity uniquely into the core of the work. Says Mellis: "What I confirmed for myself and many others, is that aesthetic access can be used in ways that add layer, texture, meaning and richness to a work. Art, at its simplest, is primarily about communication. Aesthetic access, at its simplest, is a form of communication that communicates to everyone."



Artists Jo Dunbar, Michelle Ryan, Kyra Kimpton and Emma J Hawkins, in *Take Up Thy Bed and Walk* by Gaelle Mellis, presented by Vitalstatistix Theatre Company. Credit: Heath Britten.



Restless Dance Theatre
Dancer: Chris Dyke
Credit: Shane Reid.

There is evidence of the impacts and benefits of work by artists with disability.

*Connecting Australians: Results of the National Arts Participation Survey (2017)*¹³ highlighted the increasingly powerful role of the arts in promoting social cohesion and connection. Three in four Australians believe the arts are an important way to get a different perspective on a topic or issue, and two in three believe the arts help us to understand other people and cultures, and allow us to connect to others. The experiences of artists and arts leaders supported through the Arts and Disability funding and Sync Leadership initiatives align with these findings. Both groups reported a high level of audience engagement and feedback. Many also reported shifts in perceptions about disability, from people with and without disability.

Artists supported through the Arts and Disability funding initiative reported their projects had a range of positive impacts on communities and audiences. Arts practice informed by the experience of disability can have a transformative

impact on both art form and audience experience. The increased accessibility incorporated in some work can also lead to enhanced experiences, including for audiences without disability.

Public discourse about arts and culture points to increasing audience appetite for work from diverse perspectives.¹⁴ The case study research highlights an increasing willingness from programmers and presenters in major platforms and venues to prioritise and program work by diverse artists, including artists with disability (see page 19). However, challenges remain for many artists with disability in reaching broad audiences, including attitudinal, accessibility and financial barriers.¹⁵ The *Connecting Australians* research points to the power of art to shift perceptions, generate empathy and bring people together. With audiences increasingly seeking out work from diverse perspectives, there is great potential for increasing audiences for the work of artists with disability.



BIG ANXIETY FESTIVAL

Platforms, participation, transformation

The *Big Anxiety Festival*, first staged in 2017, places mental health and neurodiversity at the centre of its artistic mission. Artistic Director Jill Bennett describes the Festival as a call to action for artists, scientists and communities to address mental health as a collective, social responsibility: “We have asked all our artists and collaborators what their projects can do for people – how they can help us shape our lives and environments. We want to deliver projects with effect, encounters that spark connections and actions.”

¹³ *Connecting Australians: Results of the National Arts Participation Survey, 2017*, Australia Council for the Arts <http://www.australiacouncil.gov.au/research/connecting-australians/>

¹⁴ For instance, a recent media report on arts and disability by Reich, H. 2018, ‘Performers with disability reflect on the state of access in Australia’s arts,’ *ABC Arts*, 1 May 2018, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-04-30/performers-with-disability-state-of-access-australia-arts/9710572>

¹⁵ Dunphy, K 2009, ‘Increasing Opportunities for People With Disability to Participate in the Arts: Assisting local government and other cultural development workers to develop capacity,’ Presentation to *Arts Activated* Conference <https://www.culturaldevelopment.net.au/wp-content/uploads/2010/03/Kim-Dunphy-Arts-Activated-conference-presentation-compressed-copy.pdf>

Decottignies, M 2016, ‘Disability Arts and Equity in Canada,’ *Canadian Theatre Review*, April 7, <https://ctr.utpjournals.press/doi/full/10.3138/ctr165.009>

People with disability are a wide and diverse group. Opportunities and barriers to create, work, and participate in the arts are complex and varied.

There are great differences among people who identify with disability, including lived experience and impairment, as well as age, cultural, linguistic, socio-economic background and where people live. The barriers to entry and ways to navigate a sustainable career as a professional artist or arts worker are as complex and varied as people themselves.

Participants in the evaluations identified the need to ensure that programs of support for artists with disability were inclusive of young and emerging artists, artists with disability from regional and remote areas, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists with disability, and those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Wider research points to compounding challenges relating to disability among certain groups. First Nations people experience disability at a significantly higher rate than the wider population.¹⁶ People born overseas access support services at a lower rate,¹⁷ and migrants from non-English speaking countries and refugees with disability may face additional stigma and disadvantage.¹⁸

Arts organisations who supported artists to apply to the Arts and Disability funding initiative, including by auspicing or administering successful grants, highlighted the very diverse support needs and challenges experienced by artists. They noted that some artists face more complex barriers to career entry and development, some have more intensive access needs, and many will need to rely on support for their access requirements throughout their careers.

The case study research (see page 19) highlights the vital role of informal support from family, friends and carers. For artists with intellectual or learning disability, this informal support can be an important bridge to accessing arts participation and learning opportunities. It can play a role in advocating for access when artists encounter barriers, and encouraging self-confidence and belief in their capabilities and creativity.

First Nations people experience disability at a significantly higher rate than the wider population. People born overseas access support services at a lower rate, and migrants from non-English speaking countries and refugees with disability may face additional stigma and disadvantage.

16 Australian Bureau of Statistics 2017, *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People with a Disability 2012*, ABS Cat.4433.0.55.005, <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats%5Cabs@.nsf/o/176B7899CCE3B173CA257D9E00112463?Opendocument>

17 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2017, *Disability support services: services provided under the National Disability Agreement 2015-16*. Bulletin no.140, June 2017. Canberra: AIHW, p13 <https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/59d79315-2b0f-481b-a918-e2b597f41acb/20458.pdf.aspx?inline=true>

18 King, J, Edwards, N, Correa-Velez, I, Hair, S, and Fordyce, M 2016, *Disadvantage and disability: Experiences of people from refugee backgrounds with disability living in Australia. Disability and the Global South (DGS)*, Vol.3, No.1, 843-864 <https://eprints.qut.edu.au/98860/1/dgsarticle.pdf>

Agency and ownership are critical.

Great art happens when artists with disability have creative control and lead their practice.

Participants of both the Arts and Disability funding and Sync Leadership evaluations emphasised the importance of disability-led practice. Arts organisations who supported artists to apply for the Arts and Disability funding initiative and auspiced successful grants recognised the importance of artistic agency. They acknowledge the importance of the shift to systems where artists with disability lead their own projects and apply directly for support. Applications that were disability-led (demonstrating the self-determination and voice of the artist with disability) were highly regarded by peers who assessed applications to the Arts and Disability funding initiative.

Stakeholders in the evaluations also emphasised the importance of ethical frameworks ensuring people with disability maintain control of their artistic practice, projects and choices. The importance of these frameworks was heightened for artists with intellectual disability and complex support needs. The value of collaboration for professional and artistic development was also highlighted, including collaboration with peers, both with and without disability. Stakeholders also affirm the importance of frameworks to ensure collaborations can support equity, reciprocity and agency for all involved.

While the principle of ‘disability-led’ was broadly recognised, the research into best practice points to the need for a shared understanding of what this means in practice for artists and funding programs.¹⁹



Artist Debra Keenahan with participant in *Awkward Conversations* at the *Big Anxiety Festival*. Credit: Skyline Productions.

¹⁹ Arts Council England reviewed and updated definitions of ‘diverse led’ and ‘disability-led’ for regularly funded organisations for annual reporting. Arts Council England 2016, ‘Defining Diverse -led organisations,’ <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/diversity-and-equality/consultation-defining-diverse-led-organisations>

Visible success stories, role models and mentors are key to building opportunities and leadership.

The importance of visible success stories, role models and mentors was highlighted throughout the evaluations. These themes also recur throughout the literature on arts and disability.²⁰ This includes the value of role models in inspiring artists and demonstrating the capability for leadership to the wider sector; and additionally the isolating effect of a lack of role models, and pressures associated with the ‘burden of representation’. The research points to the importance of activity that profiles, celebrates and acknowledges the achievements of trail blazers and leading lights at all stages of career development.

Many artists supported through the Arts and Disability funding initiative used funding to engage mentors. Overall, applicants were far more likely to incorporate mentorship, learning and professional

development as an element in their projects compared to individual artists (with or without disability) supported through the Council’s core grants program.²¹ Sync Leadership participants also highlighted the importance of mentoring. Many examples of mentoring relationships (including those highlighted in this paper) underline the importance of shifting dynamics and two-way learning that occurs in this exchange.

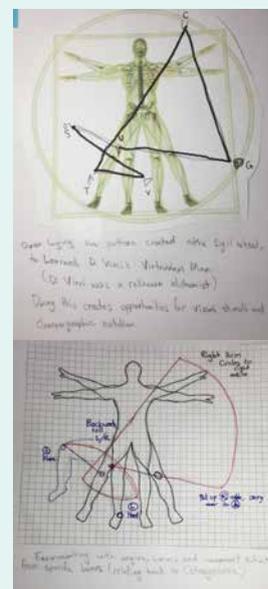
Sync Leadership participants also identified significant shifts in the arts and disability sector, although they believed that disability leadership was still in an early stage of development in Australia. They identified a range of obstacles that remain for arts leaders with disability, including securing paid work at the appropriate level, and transitioning into leadership roles across the sector.

MATT SHILCOCK

Mentorship, collaboration, mastery

Matt Shilcock has worked with an array of artists, mentors and collaborators throughout his developing career, among them Philip Channels, Dean Walsh and Vangelis Legakis. He credits a long-term collaboration with Walsh for encouraging him to recognise and move away from reproducing unnatural movement systems to create a system and choreographic language organic to his own body. In a series of projects undertaken since his first residency in 2012, Matt has built mentoring, masterclasses and professional development for other artists with disability into his collaborations, showing that the flow of learnings from these relationships is multi-directional. Matt has recently completed a residency with the Helsinki International Artist Program (HIAP) on research and development for *The Likes of Me* and subsequent works in his *Eujeanix* triptych.

Matt Shilcock - diagram of notation process. Work-in-progress as part of a residency at the Helsinki International Artist Program (HIAP), Finland. Credit: Matt Shilcock.



²⁰ Relevant sources include: DADAA Inc 2012, *Art Works. Employment in the Arts for People with Disability: Current Status, Barriers and Strategies*, <http://www.dadaa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Art-Works-Full-Report-Web.pdf>

Marsh, K 2016, ‘Becoming Leaderful - A Personal Reflection’ *Critical Dialogues*, Issue 7, September, https://issuu.com/criticalpath/docs/critical_dialogues_issue_7_accessib

Dow, S 2016, ‘Disability and the ‘New Normal’: Why Australia needs to ramp up access to stage and screen, <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2016/sep/24/disability-and-the-new-normal-why-australia-needs-to-ramp-up-access-to-stage-and-screen>

Arts Council England and ewgroup 2018, *Making a Shift Report*, Arts Council England, <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/publication/making-a-shift>

²¹ See footnote 6 for further information on Australia Council core grants program.

Julia Hales, Joshua Bott and
Lauren Marchbank in *You Know We Belong
Together*, Perth Festival/BSSTC/DADAA.
Credit: Toni Wilkinson/Perth Festival.

CASE STUDY

JULIA HALES ARTISTIC AMBITION, LEADING TO SUCCEED

*In 2018 Perth Festival premiered a new Australian work **You Know We Belong Together**. Its star and creator Julia Hales collaborated with an extraordinary team to spark ideas about love, sexuality, relationships, starting a family, and how people with disability are portrayed in popular culture. A co-production between WA arts and disability organisation DADAA, Perth Festival and Black Swan State Theatre Company, the story focused on Julia's desire for love, and to portray a character in her favorite show **Home and Away**. These themes galvanized her creative collaborators and moved audiences at sellout performances. Julia also has Down syndrome.*



Early opportunities to participate in the arts are important to spark curiosity and engagement.

Informal support from family, friends and carers plays a vital role.

At age 16, Julia Hales watched her older sister on stage and was inspired to perform. Julia described how family support, particularly her mother, gave her confidence to pursue a career in performance, saying: “She always wanted me to follow my dreams.”

To support her ambition, Julia’s mother connected her with arts and disability organisation DADAA where she met mentor Simone Flavelle and other artists, commencing a collaboration that has lasted for more than 20 years. Simone recalled: “Julia came to meet us in 1996, she was about to leave school and we were about to do a little mini festival – it was very early days for DADAA. She was quite clear she wanted to be a performer.”

DADAA’s programs are built around the aspirations of artists and communities to empower expression.



Julia Hales performing in *You Know We Belong Together*, Perth Festival/BSSTC/DADAA. Credit: Toni Wilkinson/Perth Festival.

Ethical frameworks ensure artists with disability can lead their own work.

The approach is disability-led, artist-led, and informed by an ethical framework. Mentorship and learning are embedded into the creation of work. Artistic outcomes are high quality, seeking to engage audiences, change perceptions, and support pathways to professional practice.

Julia's work with DADAA has evolved since the late 1990s through collaborations across theatre, dance and digital media. In 2001 Julia starred in *Exile*, a major DADAA theatre production at Fremantle Arts Centre. In 2005, she performed in the radio play *The Proper Shoes*, a co-production with ABC Perth broadcast on ABC Radio National. In 2008 Julia travelled to Ireland to perform *The Proper Shoes* with a local arts group KCAT.

As Julia developed, she took on artistic and project leadership and is now a facilitator and role model for other artists.

Julia pursued formal arts training, including at the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts (WAAPA). She has also gained recognition in new fields, including as a public speaker.

In 2015, Julia participated in the Australia Council's Sync Leadership program, encouraging her to set clear goals and a plan for her career. Julia's evolution as an artist and her experience at Sync fuelled her ambition to create her own work.

In 2016 through DADAA's *Digital Dialogues* project Julia produced the short documentary *Finding Love*, drawing out candid insights from her peers with Down syndrome about their experiences and desires. Julia's recent collaborators identified *Finding Love* as pivotal to the momentum that grew around her artistic vision.

Champions for disability and inclusion across the whole arts ecology play an important role in creating change.

At the time Julia was creating *Finding Love*, Wendy Martin commenced as Artistic Director of Perth Festival. Wendy had curated the lauded *Unlimited* arts and disability festival in the UK for the 2012 Paralympics. *Unlimited* is now an annual international event commissioning and presenting work by artists with disability. Wendy recalls arriving in Perth in 2015: "I started talking about disability arts. Everybody said, *you've got to discover DADAA.*" They quickly formed a partnership to support Wendy's goal to place arts and disability at the centre of her vision for the festival.

Funding and support comes together from many different partners.

In 2017, Julia received an Australia Council grant to work with mentor Finn O'Branagáin, an independent writer and theatre maker, and they began collaborating on a script for a longer theatre piece based on *Finding Love*. They subsequently received creative development support from the Blue Room Theatre's LOFT program. It was at this time that Clare Watson and Black Swan became involved.

Clare commenced as the Artistic Director of Black Swan State Theatre Company in 2017. She recalled Wendy's introduction to Julia and DADAA: "She said, I wonder if there's something here... I'd love to see Julia make a show and for it to be in the festival." Clare said she immediately recognised the spark at the heart of Julia's vision, and the rich potential in the story.

With all the production partners on board, Julia's *Finding Love* project evolved into *You Know We Belong Together*.

Finn O'Branagáin described the impact of Perth Festival and Black Swan's involvement:

"It suddenly meant that we were looking at a much bigger stage ... Being able to afford to spend more time together, and knowing there was a director attached that would take it to a really exciting place."

As the project moved into production there were learnings and adjustments for all. The cast were performers with disability, some performing professionally for the first time. The partners all recognised the importance of a disability-led artistic process and ensuring access needs were accommodated.

Great art happens when artists with disability have creative control and lead their practice opportunities and leadership.

Critical for all involved was the integrity of Julia's vision and voice. The process was driven by Julia's and her peers' stories and experiences. Dramaturgy emphasised conversation and storytelling. Design, staging and assistive technologies were adapted to enrich the production, giving it freshness and spontaneity. Simone Flavelle: "I think that Clare [Watson]'s genius or artistry was in really supporting the artists to be comfortable on stage, and confident to be themselves."



Julia Hales and cast members of *You Know We Belong Together*, Perth Festival/BSSTC/DADAA. Credit: Toni Wilkinson/Perth Festival.

Visible success stories, role models and mentors are key to building opportunities and leadership.

You Know We Belong Together premiered at Perth Festival in 2018. Performance mentor Laura Boynes described its impact, echoing the sellout crowd and critical response: “

“People told me it was the best thing they’d seen in the Perth Festival. People laughed and cried ... because I was on stage with [Julia and the other performers] every night, I could really feel the audience, and they were just on a wild ride with them every night.”

Artists report positive impacts on communities and audiences.

Julia agrees: “the audience when they left... they went ‘Wow, I can’t believe this woman put all of this into a show’ and they loved it and I just feel like everything that I worked for as part of this show. It makes me happy to show that out to the real world.”

Julia has ambition to develop further as a performer and theatre maker. She is also aware of her role as a leader, and the impact of her visibility and platform to advocate for and encourage her peers:

“I wanted to keep going with my leadership and I wanted to work and I wanted to give back to my community [and run] goal setting workshops with all sorts of people with disabilities, and I have started with that. The goal-setting is mostly about dreaming big, what they want in their dream so I show them the way I learnt ... like stepping stones around their map.”

In August 2018, Black Swan announced the return of *You Know We Belong Together* for their 2019 season. Back by popular demand.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

The Australia Council for the Arts remains committed to support for artists with disability, as set out in our Strategic Plan, Corporate Plan and Disability Action Plan.

In the context of a review of the National Arts and Disability Strategy the Council is considering how to target its resources to best support the needs of artists with disability. Insights and learnings set out in this paper will inform the strategy for support and will be underpinned by the following key principles:

- Australia Council investments and strategies for artists with disability intersect with: those of our state and territory partners: activities of arts and disability organisations: developments across the arts sector: and broader disability policies and services. This ecology also encompasses interactions between individual artists, arts workers and various organisations that influence the participation of people with disability in the arts – as makers and arts professionals, as well as participants and audiences.
- It is important that artists with disability can compete for funding equitably. Diversity in needs, background and experience of disability mean the barriers to entry into professional arts practice, and sustaining a career in the arts are varied.
- Visible success stories, role models and mentors are critical for building successful careers and leadership, underlining the importance of recognition and reward for talent and great art.
- Support for arts and disability needs to be monitored and the impacts evaluated to understand its value and impact. This is an important dimension of the Council's commitment to public reporting on diversity, as set out in our DAP 2017-19.

The Australia Council will explore these insights and outline the Council's future support for arts and disability at *Meeting Place* in September 2018. *Meeting Place* is a national arts and disability forum and the signature event of Arts Access Australia, the national peak body for arts and disability in Australia.



Back to Back Theatre,
Lady Eats Apple.
Credit: Jeff Busby.



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