

**The Winston Churchill Memorial Trust**

**Churchill Fellowship 2002**

Beyond wheelchair ramps:  
museum services and intellectual access for  
audiences with specific needs.

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## **Contents**

1. Précis and Acknowledgements
2. Executive summary
  - 2.1 Fellowship Objective
  - 2.2 Fellowship Highlights
  - 2.3 Major Findings
  - 2.4 Implementation of Research
3. Introduction
  - 3.1 Why is the study of intellectual access to museums important?
  - 3.2 What do we need to know?
  - 3.3 Who is the audience?
  - 3.4 Why do we need to change?
4. Legislation
5. Support Organisations
  - 5.1 The UK situation
  - 5.2 The US situation
6. Intellectual access services for people with disabilities in museums in the UK and US and their application in Australia
  - 6.1 Programs
  - 6.2 Promotion
  - 6.3 Human Resources management
  - 6.4 Policy
7. Recommendations
8. Conclusion
9. Appendices
  - Appendix 1 Glossary of terms
  - Appendix 2 Program of visits
  - Appendix 3 Bibliography

# 1. Précis and Acknowledgements

## 1.1 Précis

This report details the findings from a 2002 Churchill Memorial Trust Fellowship to the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States of America (US) with the aim of investigating museum and gallery 'best practice' interpretive programs for audiences with specific needs, namely gifted students and people with disabilities.

The objective of the research trip was to develop Australian models for the delivery of programs that enhance the museum experience for these audiences, and encourage their increased participation.

As wide a range of museums and galleries as possible was visited in order to gain an understanding of access issues for people with disabilities across the broad range of sites that can be included in the term **museum**.<sup>1</sup> In addition, a number of museum professional associations and disability arts support organisations were approached to get an overview of disability access issues across the museum sector and within the **disability communities**<sup>2</sup>.

There are very tangible practices that can be applied to the Australian situation. These can be divided into those that can be achieved in the short (almost immediately), medium (within the next 2-3 years) and long terms (sustainable and ongoing provision, achievable within the next 5 years).

## 1.2 Acknowledgments

The institutions visited were in London, New York, Boston, Washington, D.C. and Los Angeles. None of this would have been without:

- the financial assistance given to me by the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust and their belief in my project,
- the support and commitment of the Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales in ensuring that staff have opportunities to develop and extend their professional expertise to meet the needs of the museum and heritage sectors,
- the assistance and encouragement of my colleagues in the Education Unit of the Historic Houses Trust,
- the generosity of the people and institutions I met in their willingness to share information and contacts that ensured that I received the maximum benefit from my Fellowship trip, and

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<sup>1</sup> an institution that preserves, researches and interprets objects and places of cultural significance. See Glossary for further details.

<sup>2</sup> there is not one but many disability communities. As with ethnic minorities, people with disabilities do not wish to be seen as one group of people. They all have different needs, lifestyles and interests.

- my family, Nick, Chris, Judy and Peter for their love, support and encouragement through the whole experience, and Alex and Sue for the bed on their floor.

## 2. Executive Summary

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### 2.1 Fellowship Objective

To investigate museum and gallery 'best practice' interpretive programs for audiences with specific needs, notably those with disabilities, but including also gifted students, so as to develop Australian models for development, delivery, resourcing, promotion, community consultation and involvement, and staff training.

### 2.2 Fellowship Highlights

- Ellen Rubin, Renee Wells, Rebecca McGinnis, Mary Jeanette Martz – professional museum access consultants
- The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Museum of Modern Art – program development, delivery and promotion to the widest possible audience
- National Maritime Museum, Museum of Science, Boston, - high level of outreach and community involvement in projects
- Old Sturbridge Village, Mass., English Heritage, Paul Revere House – direct comparison of issues faced by historic places, such as Historic Houses Trust properties
- MAGDA and Resource, VSA Arts, ASTC – management and promotion of access issues and approaches across entire arts sector including museums, galleries and historic places in both the UK and the US
- Museum of Science, Boston – accessible exhibition planning, production and evaluation, including consultation with access specialists
- Bank Street College – museum education profession training, contacts with students involved in museum access

## 2.3 Major Findings

1. Within the museum sectors in both the UK and the US, there is a high level of awareness and commitment to the needs of different audiences in accessing buildings, collections and interpretive services. This is evidenced by the employment of access officers and other proactive and inclusive policies.
2. The recent acceleration of implementation of legislation informing provision of services for people with disabilities within communities has spurred many public and private museums to make their services available to the widest possible audience.
3. The term **access**<sup>3</sup> is increasingly used in preference to 'disability access' when talking about services that enhance a museum visit for people with specific needs.
4. There are very tangible practices that can be applied to the Australian situation. These include:

### Communication

- inclusion of **international access symbols**<sup>4</sup> in all published material, including promotional brochures and posters, media releases, and signage within the museum,
- being honest about the services an institution can provide, but being accountable for doing as much as possible.

### Services

- provision of both services that provide access to mainstream museum programs and those developed to specifically meet the needs of a particular group,
- use of technology to enhance interpretation and education services, eg internet,

### Human Resource management

- employment of a member of staff to coordinate access issues to ensure continuity across all institutional departments,
- commitment to provision of ongoing and regular staff training in front line service delivery, exhibition design, and policy development and action planning,

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<sup>3</sup> describes those provisions that encourage engagement with museum activities, especially for people with specific needs such as those with disabilities but also other traditionally non-museum going populations eg youth, people isolated for economic and social reasons, the aged, and those from ethnic minorities.

<sup>4</sup> symbols used to promote and publicise the accessibility of places, programs and other activities for people with various disabilities. See Glossary for further details.

#### Community involvement

- partnership building with local schools, activity centers, parent councils, community groups etc,
- involvement of local community members as consultants on access services, and

#### Promotion

- establishment of a consortium of museum professionals interested in access to discuss issues, share information, jointly promote museum and gallery programs, provide training and offer advice.

## **2.4 Implementation of Research**

It is envisaged that the findings and recommended actions in this report will, initially, be disseminated to the Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales, the NSW and wider Australian museum sector through:

- integration of new practices to the work of the Historic Houses Trust, with the dual aims of improving services at the properties it manages and providing a model for the museum sector,
- presentation to the annual Historic Houses Trust Disability Access Forum,
- presentation to the Museums Australia Education Special Interest Group NSW branch,
- articles in museum sector journals, eg the Museums Australia Education Special Interest Group journal,
- call for the formation of a consortium of museum access professionals, and
- presentations to various interested bodies including Accessible Arts NSW, the Australia Council for the Arts, the Museums and Galleries Foundation of NSW.

### 3. Introduction

#### 3.1 Why is the study of intellectual access to museums important?

Museums are ideal places to foster the learning of people with specific education needs. Those that find it difficult to reach maximum potential in traditional learning environments, often thrive in the multi-sensory and object based learning programs offered in a museum, gallery or historic house. The provision of services for those with specific access needs illuminates opportunities for meeting general needs.

In this climate of increasing pressure to justify public spending, the study of intellectual access to museums is warranted for social, legal and business reasons. Museums are established in the public interest as organisations that contribute long-term value to all members of the community. It is unlawful for anyone to be discriminated against in terms of access to goods and services because they have a disability. And, it makes good business sense, better access means greater audience attendance as all people will benefit from the greater variety and ease of use of the facilities.

Research undertaken for this Fellowship highlighted Australia's high level of achievement in this area. However, further effort is needed to accelerate us 'beyond the wheelchair ramp', and its implication of a focus on physical access issues, towards the high standards of intellectual access found overseas.

Increasingly leading museums differentiate between **physical access**<sup>5</sup> and **intellectual access**<sup>6</sup>. Intellectual access includes those practices a museum employs to encourage visitors to access, enjoy and understand its collections. These could be:

- promotional advertisements and brochures,
- tours,
- exhibition labels,
- guidebooks,
- education services,
- web sites,
- audio and visual material,
- lectures,
- festivals,
- music,
- theatre and film programs, or
- outreach programs.

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<sup>5</sup> the ability to enter a building or place; the infrastructure employed to facilitate entry to a building or place eg wheelchair ramp, lifts, uninterrupted travelling paths, paved pathways, handrails, wide doorways, etc

<sup>6</sup> activities a museum employs in to facilitate a visitors experience of the place and objects

Intellectual access does not include physical access to a building or exhibition although this may be the subject of some of above the services.

### **3.2 What do we need to know?**

Research for this Churchill Fellowship concentrated on the provision of services for people with disabilities. Specifically, intellectual access by people who are blind, have visual disabilities, deaf, have hearing disabilities, have physical disabilities, have intellectual disabilities or have a mental illness. The rest of this report will focus on this audience group.

While one of the aims of this research trip was to investigate museum education service provision for gifted and talented students, virtually none of the institutions visited develop or tailor programs to particularly serve this audience. Instead, they believe that museums naturally cater for this audience by stimulating them to extend their knowledge and skills to their own level, as they do for all visitors.

In order to best understand what we can learn from international models, a number of research questions were formulated so as to focus on the practices of museums, and in particular those departments responsible for developing services, that encourage the use of museums by disability communities.

These questions included:

- what sorts of services are most effective, ie most utilised and of most benefit to the local community, and for what reasons?
- to what extent are programs designed specifically for people with disabilities? To what extent are existing services modified?
- how do museums work with these communities in the design and promotion of services?
- to what extent do museums use access and/or disability consultants in the exhibition/interpretive program development process?
- how are the services of the museum promoted to the different disabilities communities?
- how is access managed within the organisation?
- what disability awareness training is provided to museum staff? How is this tailored to the specific jobs in a museum? Who delivers this training?
- what support or consultant services are available for museums, eg from relevant government departments, disability arts organisations and professional associations?
- what is the legislation governing access?

### **3.3 Who is the audience?**

It is difficult to get accurate figures on total numbers of people with a disability for a range of reasons. Notably, it depends on whether they identify themselves as

having a disability.<sup>7</sup> Also statistics are gathered differently, again depending what is defined as a disability. Roughly, however, it can be said that about 19% of the Australian population has a disability. In comparing this figure with that of the UK, 14% of population and the US, 18% of population, it is significant that we are talking about similarly proportional groups of the total population. In NSW about 18% of this group regularly attend cultural institutions.

### **3.4 Why do we need to change?**

The museum sector in Australia is made up of small, medium and large organisations funded through federal, state and territory, and local governments, private trust funds, public subscriptions etc. They employ both paid and volunteer staff.

Currently, the following museum services that increase access to the objects and places are provided for people with disabilities:

- adapted guided tours and education services, including outreach programs, on demand,
- Braille and large print guides, and tactile plans,
- Auslan interpretation,
- brochures detailing access services,
- installation of wheelchair ramps and lifts to aid physical access, and
- advertisement of programs in some community media outlets eg the RPH network, Radio for the Print Handicapped.

However, these attempts to link to disability communities are invariably reliant on the initiative of one person rather than any museum policy. This means such services are scarce, poorly documented, inconsistent, across the sector and even within individual institutions, and as not well promoted to disability communities as overseas examples.

## **4. Legislation**

The UK, US and Australia each have legislation which makes it unlawful for anyone to be discriminated against in terms of access to goods and services, premises open to the public, employment, accommodation and sporting and recreational facilities because they have a disability.

The Americans were the first to legislate against the discrimination of people based on disability with the introduction of the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990. In Australia, the Discrimination Act came into effect in 1992, and in the UK in 1995. Australian states also have separate legislation governing discrimination. Organisations and individuals are required to comply with both.

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<sup>7</sup> difficulty carrying out everyday tasks due to an impairment of persons body or mental functions

All museum services are covered, including exhibitions, research facilities, events, information, shop and café. It is unlawful to refuse to provide a service provided for others or to provide a lower standard of service or offer a service on lesser terms. All service providers must make reasonable adjustments to the way they provide their services.

This means museums must:

- provide auxiliary aids to enable or make it easier for a person with a disability to access a service,
- change policies, practices and procedures which make it difficult for a person with a disability to use a service, and or
- provide a service through an alternative method which will to ensure equal opportunity.

Many museums, especially historic houses and sites, are governed by heritage legislation that controls conservation and use, including building alterations. This often conflicts with disability discrimination legislation requirements to provide access to all buildings and places open to the public. It is therefore pertinent that museums present multiple and innovative services to increase intellectual access to their products, be they education programs, exhibitions or beautiful grounds.

## 5. Support Organisations

One of the major objectives of the research tour was to compare the level of consultancy and funding support available to Australian, British and American museums. A number of museum professional associations and disability arts support organisations were approached to get an overview of disability access issues across the museum sector and within the disability communities.

Arts advisory bodies, such as Accessible Arts NSW, Disability in the Arts, Disadvantage in the Arts, Australia (DADAA), and Arts Access, guide and support museums and other arts organisations in making their services more accessible. These services include education and training programs, development and funding of specific projects and publishing how-to resource packs eg the **Disability Fact Pack**, a guide to disability legislation and practices for arts and cultural organisations. The Australia Council, the federal government's arts advisory board, provides advice for the marketing and funding of arts projects. They have recently published **Access All Areas**, a guide to marketing to people with disabilities.

In comparison with the situation found overseas, the Department for Communication, Information Technology and the Arts, the relevant state arts ministries, Museums Australia and Museums and Galleries Foundation in New South Wales provide a lesser level of support and information regarding accessible practices.

Major services provided overseas are discussed in the remainder of this section.

## **5.1 The UK situation: support organisations**

### **5.1.1 Resource, the Council for Museums, Libraries and Archives**

The recent government push for social inclusion is informing commitment to access and learning for all groups in society. This has required all government bodies to respond with initiatives that promote and enforce this policy. In terms of museums and galleries in the UK, that body is Resource, the Council for Museums, Libraries and Archives. Resource is funded through the Department of Culture, Media and Sport.

Resource is the strategic body empowered to advise the government and museums, libraries and archives on the long term development of the sectors institutions. The Learning and Access unit within Resource is responsible for managing the provision of services to the widest possible audience.

Currently the system is undergoing change. Resource will be responsible for funding area councils which will reflect its own structure, ie be responsible for the museums, archives and libraries in their geographic area. Each will have its own Learning and Access unit which will work with all cultural institutions to ensure a high level of access for people with disabilities, those from different ethnic groups, the aged, youth, families, and those disadvantaged for social or economic reasons.

### **5.1.2 Museums and Galleries Disability Association (MAGDA)**

The UK is also lucky enough to have the Museums and Galleries Disability Association. It exists to promote the rights of people with a disability to enjoy museums, galleries and heritage sites by encouraging these organisations to achieve access for all.

MAGDA pursues its mission by: responding to government policies and papers, and inquiries from individuals and museums regarding disability access. It also publishes *Barrierfree*, a quarterly magazine that documents service provision, encouraging the sharing of ideas and experiences between institutions and with the different disability communities.

MAGDA draws the majority of its funds and its managing committee from its membership, a group that includes museum professionals, access professionals and museum goers who have disabilities.

One of MAGDA's major achievements is the ongoing delivery and promotion of access training. Being a national body, it is able to monitor those individuals and organisations who are doing innovative work. It can mobilise them tackle issues

that are relevant to the local situation, including creating networks between museums and with their local disability communities.

### **5.1.3 Museums Association**

One of the oldest museum associations in the world, the Museums Association of the UK seeks to influence accessible practice implementation to its constituents.

It does this by:

- working with Resource and MAGDA to publish the ***Disability Directory***,
- publishing the ***Museums Yearbook*** which includes a listing of access consultants and their areas of expertise,
- through its Code of Ethics which encourages a minimum level of service provision, and
- the publication of ***Museums Journal*** and ***Museum Practice***, magazines that document new and innovative practice thereby encouraging debate and the communication of ideas and experiences.

## **5.2 The US situation: support organisation**

### **5.2.1 The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA)**

The National Endowment for the Arts is an independent agency of the federal government. Its role is to support arts and culture in the US through the funding of significant projects. The NEA Office for AccessAbility is the advocacy and technical assistance arm for people with disabilities, older adults, veterans and people living in institutions.

The Office manages programs that aim to achieve the following:

- provide technical assistance to individuals and organisations to make the arts fully accessible and in compliance with the disability anti-discrimination laws,
- educate and communicate the benefit of arts programming to serve the needs of people with disabilities and the elderly,
- internal consultation with other Endowment divisions,
- partnerships with other arts bodies including organising workshops, seminars and conferences for arts professionals regarding accessibility and the arts.

### **5.2.2 VSA Arts**

VSA Arts is an arts and disability body which aims to assist people with disabilities to access arts practices and organisations as visitors, as staff, as participants, and as artists. VSA Arts have representative offices in most states across the US.

VSA Arts provides of vast array of programs which allow for the specific needs of people with disabilities to access cultural activities including:

- cheap theatre tickets,
- **AccessExpressed**, a published and online magazine that includes events calendars and articles about new and innovative practices,
- general disability awareness and access training for cultural organisations including museums, and
- forming partnerships with organisations for specific programs eg the children's arts festival at the Museum of Science in Boston,
- promotion of best-practice examples through the "Access Innovation in the Arts Award" program, of which the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston was a winner in 1999.<sup>8</sup>

VSA Arts Massachusetts provides the model for this research report because it is one of the largest and most active members of the national body. Also, as one of the aims of the project was to study how such organisations work in partnership with museums, the in depth study of Boston's museum sector allowed for observation of the achievements of these networks.

### **5.2.3 Association of Science-Technology Centres, Inc (ASTC)**

ASTC is an organisation of science centres and museums dedicated to furthering the public understanding of science. It has members worldwide and aims to encourage and support excellence and innovation through a variety of professional development programs and services.

One of these programs, **Accessible Practices**, seeks to support members in their efforts to make programs accessible to the widest possible audience, including those with disabilities. Under this banner, ASTC provides the following resources on their website:

- museums' legal obligations,
- links to disability community sites,
- practical how-to pages such as working with access advisers, conducting access surveys, writing access plans, creating access guides, funding avenues, and
- examples of 'best practice'.

In addition, in partnership with six science centres across the US, ASTC is currently running a series workshops that provide an opportunity for museum

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<sup>8</sup> Awards programs really do help to promote 'best practice' in any area. For example in 2001 the Interpret Britain Awards Committee decided to nominate non-traditional audiences as its Special Category. This resulted in a number of innovative programs being documented in the Spring 2002 edition of **Interpretation**, the Journal of the Association for Heritage Interpretation, thus providing inspiration and information for all cultural organisations. Coincidentally, Resource is investigating the introduction of its own awards scheme to promote and encourage 'best practice' accessibly programs across the sector it manages.

professionals to learn from accessibility professionals and meet various people with disabilities, primarily those from their own region, in order increase communication and understanding of audience needs and create networks and partnerships. Each centre hosts two workshops: the first focusing on facilities and visitor services, and another on the design of interactive and inclusive exhibitions.

## **6. Intellectual access services for people with disabilities in museums in the UK and US and their application in Australia**

This section of the report highlights the results of discussions held with staff of museums in both the UK and the US. Whilst a range of different cultural sector organisations were visited, the objective of the Fellowship was to investigate the practices employed to increase access to museum collections and services for people with disabilities.

The findings are presented as a list of actions for Australian museums. Implementation of these models of program development and delivery, promotional opportunities, staff training and human resource management, and policy and administration will ensure services are intellectually accessible for the widest possible audience, specifically those with disabilities.

In order to make their implementation to the Australia situation easier, the list has been organised into those practices that can be achieved in the short (almost immediately), medium (within the next 2-3 years) and long terms (sustainable and ongoing provision, achievable within the next 5 years).

### **6.1 Programs**

#### **Short term**

- Provide specifically developed programs but also design mainstream programs to be inclusive. This means that activities, venues and delivery styles have to be able to reach as wider a range of people as possible and cater to different learning styles while taking into account those situations where it is necessary to provide special services to ensure equal access.
- Accessible guidelines for the production of printed material (eg information brochures, guide books, exhibition labels) should be followed. See Bibliography for details.
- Recognise that outreach visits are a valuable way of providing or enhancing museum access. Have these as stand alone events or included as part of a multi-visit program.

#### **Medium term**

- All front line staff, whether paid or volunteer must be trained in communicating with and understanding the needs of people with disabilities.
- Provide sign language interpretation where possible, eg for the monthly lecture series, Sunday family guided tours, or at festivals.

#### **Long term**

- If programs are self-guided, then audio, large print, tactile and easy to understand materials should be produced. Provide a touch collection, eg, a bag to be picked up at reception that contains objects of similar shape and materials to those found in the galleries.

- Experiment with new technology to enhance understanding and access to exhibitions and education programs eg the use of audio labels – accessible to all, not just those with visual impairments; audio guides – provides a visual description of objects, use teleconferencing to deliver an art appreciation program to people who can not make it to the gallery.
- Follow guidelines for accessible exhibition development. Try to inform others of the standards by communicating with consultant curatorial and design teams prior to accepting a brief. Before mounting a traveling exhibition be aware of its access standards, and, if sending on an exhibition, inform the receiving institution of the standards of access expected.
- Contribute to the positive reinforcement of the potential of people with disabilities in our society by providing, where appropriate, information of people with disabilities in history, eg as occupants of homes, as makers of objects and as instigators of social change.

## **6.2 Promotion**

### **Short term**

- Accessible guidelines for the production of printed material (eg press releases, promotional flyers, media advertisements, web site, museum guides) should be followed. See Bibliography for details.
- Include international access symbols on all promotional material. See Bibliography for details.
- Produce a flyer outlining the accessibility of the museum and services available. Include an 'access' section on the website.
- Provide as many different contact and communication methods as possible, provide a TTY service, an email address, answering machine and personal contact.

### **Medium term**

- Link both access information and event information on web sites, include access symbols to denote which services are wheelchair accessible, sign language interpreted, contain Braille or large print labels etc.
- Exploit local community media outlets eg arts and disability organisation newsletters, Deaf community newsletters, audio newsletters, radio and TV services for people with visual and hearing disabilities.
- Provide event information on a dial-up telephone service.
- Think laterally! – place information on tours for people who are blind or have visual disabilities in eye doctors waiting rooms.
- Compile a mailing list of those people who request information, attend events, as well as local disability community organisations and services. Promote particular programs to this groups as well as mainstream events.
- In communities where standard information sources are largely redundant, don't under estimate the power of word of mouth – form partnerships!

### **Long term**

- Lobby Museums Australia, or the DADAA network (eg Accessible Arts, NSW), or the Department of Aging and Disability or the Ministry for the Arts to consider establishing a best-practice awards program

## **6.3 Human resource management**

### **Short term**

- Access awareness training should involve: understanding the needs of different audiences in terms of physical access, different communication techniques and intellectual access; understanding the laws that inform access; and practical ways of making the museum more accessible.
- Provide site specific training – this is best done by someone in-house who understands the needs of staff (both paid and voluntary) and the environment of the museum eg what objects can be used in a tour for people who are blind, where can guides take kids with special needs, who will help in an emergency etc
- Use local disability and access specialists to deliver general training. Again, this is forming partnerships and promoting services.

### **Medium term**

- Training must be appropriate to all staff, eg provide tailored sessions for those that deliver services or work on the ticketing counter, for those that design interpretive programs and events, for those that produce publications and label text, for those that design exhibitions, for those that recruit staff and for those that set policy and procedure.
- If possible, train specific people to deliver services for people with disabilities, especially education services. However all program delivery staff require audience awareness training.

### **Long term**

- Employ an access coordinator who is responsible for the provision of services across the organisation. This would include intellectual access as well as physical access provisions. Major responsibilities would include: development of interpretive services and materials, staff training, internal consulting on the production of accessible promotional and informational material, exhibition design, access to services such as toilets, restaurants, festivals and events, working with and coordinating access consultants and/or advisory panel, forming and maintaining partnerships.
- Include other communities in their areas of responsibility ie make access about the widest possible audience.
- The position should be within the education, public program and visitor service areas although should have influence on all. This is an important indication that the organisation recognises that access is about different

learning needs, and not simply about providing entree to a building, exhibition or place.

## **6.4 Policy**

### **Short term**

- Use all the advisory services available – disability arts organisations, peers, both national and international. Join MAGDA.

### **Medium term**

- Document programs, events etc and publish them in industry journals to provide inspiration and encourage debate and communication amongst museum professionals who work in this area of service development and delivery (medium and long term).
- Invite local community representatives to exhibition openings, product launches and special previews, seek feedback.
- Consult with other cultural institutions, write for and read industry journals, meet each other to discuss promotional and delivery experiences, cross promote events so that they don't compete for the same audience.
- Use the mailing list (see above) as a source of interested participants who may become consultants.

### **Long term**

- Approach different disability and community organisations and involve them in specific education programs, festivals or events. Eg involve a local day centre in a multi-visit program about portraiture, including appreciation and making; include Deaf artists in a festival about music and rhythm; when working with a local geographic or ethnic community, include any disability groups that are part of that community.
- Commission research into local disability communities to establish links.
- Form an advisory panel or compile a list of consultants of interested museum going people with disabilities, museum professionals, disability experts. Involve them in decision making about exhibition and program development, new building, staff training etc. Make sure both the staff and the members of the panel are fully aware of their role, of what can and can't be achieved, and how these people are to be recompensed for their services. Make sure this fits with the museums mission and charter.
- Include people with disabilities as artists, performers or participants in programs. Where possible, and appropriate, include reference to people with disabilities in interpretive material.
- Form an Australian equivalent of MAGDA.

## 7. Recommendations

The above is an exhaustive list of the intellectual access services and practices found in a selective group of museums, galleries, historic houses and heritage sites in the UK and the US. It represents the broad spectrum of individual in-house, online, guided, self-directed and outreach education programs, promotion and information materials, consultative processes, policy and procedural practices offered by the institutions visited.

- 7.1 It is simply recommended that Australian museums employ these strategies to make their services more accessible. It is beholden to those larger federal and state government funded organisations to lead the way.
- 7.2 In particular, the following findings are repeated here in order to emphasize their importance and relevance to the Australian situation.

### Communication

- inclusion of international access symbols in all published material, including promotional brochures and posters, media releases, signage within the museum,
- being honest about the services an institution can provide, but being accountable for doing as much as possible,

### Services

- provision of both services that provide access to mainstream museum programs and those developed to specifically meet the needs of a particular group,
- use of technology to enhance interpretation and education services, eg internet,

### Human Resource management

- employment of a member of staff to coordinate access issues to ensure continuity across all institutional departments,
- commitment to provision of ongoing and regular staff training in front line service delivery, exhibition design, and policy development and action planning,

### Community involvement

- partnership building with local schools, activity centres, parent councils, community groups etc,
- involvement of local community members as consultants on access services, and

### Promotion

- establishment of a consortium of museum professionals interested in access to discuss issues, share information, jointly promote museum and gallery programs, provide training and offer advice.

7.3 Finally, it is recommended that museums use and lobby disability arts organisations, and particularly, professional associations and the relevant government bodies available, to test their potential to provide advice and support for accessible practice implementation. Demand for this type of service will lead to its increase and expansion.

## **8. Conclusion**

Museums exist to help people understand the world by using objects and ideas to interpret the past, explain the present and explore the future. Museums are established in the public interest as organisations that contribute long-term value to communities. Most museum mission statements express the desire to increase 'learning' and provide 'enjoyment' to 'the widest possible audience'.

Besides fulfilling its mission, there are other compelling motivations for museums to increase the provision of services for people with disabilities. It makes good marketing sense, better access means greater audience attendance. Improving access results in increased customer satisfaction, all people will benefit from the greater variety and ease of use of the facilities. Working with particular communities not only expands the breadth of the work of the museum and the skills of its staff but also helps to spread the word and promote it as a whole. And, increasingly, funding bodies require evidence of strategies that increase participation by all members of the community, including those with disabilities, before providing financial support.

All adults and children learn more effectively through experience and interaction. An informal learning environment such as a museum can provide the perfect opportunity for people to 'interact' with history, art or science and each other. By making museum programs accessible to people with disabilities, eg by providing a touch collection for those with visual disabilities, or an art program for people with intellectual disabilities, a museum is catering to different learning styles and increasing the learning potential, and therefore enjoyment, of a range of visitors.

In this, the United Nations Year of Cultural Heritage, it is strongly recommended that Australian museums and cultural institutions follow the lead of those in the UK and US and start consolidating access for all members of the community to increase the experience of, participation in and ownership of their culture and heritage.

## **Appendix 1      Glossary of terms**

### **access**

Describes those services that encourage engagement with museum activities, especially those with specific needs such as people with disabilities but also other traditionally non-museum going populations eg youth, people isolated for economic and social reasons, the aged, and those from ethnic minorities. This term is increasingly used in preference to 'disability access' so as to include the widest possible audience.

### **disabilities communities**

There is not one but many disability communities. As with ethnic minorities, people with disabilities do not wish to be seen as one group of people. They all have different needs, lifestyles and interests.

### **intellectual access**

The ability to access, enjoy and understand a museums collections once people have entered the building or place; activities a museum employs in to facilitate a visitors experience of the place and objects eg. promotional advertisements and brochures, tours, exhibition labels, guidebooks, education services, web sites, audio and visual material, lectures, festivals, music, theatre and film programs, and outreach programs.

### **international access symbols**

Symbols used to promote and publicise accessibility of places, programs and other activities for people with various disabilities. They include:

- the wheelchair symbol – access for people with limited mobility, including wheelchair uses,
- a person walking with a cane, - access for those who are blind or have a visual disability, and
- a pair of hands – sign language interpretation for people who are deaf.

In all there are about 12 such symbols. They can be used on signs or in print material to highlight which services are accessible. Please see Bibliography for details to where to find these symbols and how to use them.

### **physical access**

The ability to enter a building or place; the infrastructure employed to facilitate entry to a building or place eg wheelchair ramp, lifts, uninterrupted travelling paths, paved pathways, handrails, wide doorways, etc.

### **museum**

An institution that preserves, researches and interprets objects and places of cultural significance. These include art, history, natural history and science museums, fine, modern and contemporary art and craft galleries, historic houses and buildings, gardens and sites.

## Appendix 2 Program of visits

Hove, Sussex 4 February 2002

- Museums and Galleries Disability Association (MAGDA)  
Abigail Thomas, Secretary

London 5 – 18 February 2002

- Resource, the Council for Museums, Archives and Libraries  
Caroline Lang, Access Adviser
- Museums Association  
Ratan Vaswani, Ethics and Professional Development Advisor
- National Maritime Museum  
Jane Dewey, Head, Interpretation  
Anne-Marie Gill, Access Coordinator  
Catherine Smith, Lifelong Learning Coordinator  
Emma Clarke, Outreach coordinator  
Jo Drazak, Outreach assistant  
Meena Matharu, Learning Facilitator, Queen's House  
Stuart Slade, Head, Education  
Lesley Rivett, Educator  
Emily Bishop, Educator  
Joyce Fuller, Human Resources, training coordinator
- English Heritage  
Alison Hems, Head of Interpretation, and most staff of the department

New York 19 February – 4 March 2002

- Museum of Modern art  
Leah Schroder, Access Assistant, Department of Education
- Museum of the City of New York  
Robert Forloney, Learning Programs Coordinator
- Bank Street College  
Nina Jensen, Director, Museum Education Program

Ellen Rubin, student, teacher of blind students, curriculum developer and consultant to museums on access

Elly Wong, student and former Access Assistant at the Museum of Modern Art

- Lower East Side Tenement Museum  
Kate Fermoile, Director Education  
Rebecca Hinde, Associate Education and ADA coordinator
- Metropolitan Museum of Art  
Rebecca McGinnis, Access Coordinator

Boston 5 March – 19 March 2002

- Museum of Fine Arts, Boston  
Eleanor Rubin, Coordinator of Access for Audiences with Disabilities  
Hannah Goodwin, Assistant, Access for Audiences with Disabilities  
Adina Sabgir, Manager of Youth and Family Learning  
Kathleen Lomatoski, museum teacher  
volunteer guides who run *Feeling for Form*
- VSA Arts Massachusetts  
Charles Washburn, Manager  
Keith Jones, Coordinator *ArtsAccess*  
Sandy Middleton, Manager of Education
- Old Sturbridge Village  
Eric White, Head, Department Education and Public Programs  
Melissa Hurton, Access Coordinator
- Museum of Science  
Betty Davidson, Exhibit Planner  
Christine Reich, Exhibit Planner  
Nicole Michaud, Community Relations, Access for People with Disabilities
- The Paul Revere House  
Andrew Alexander, Assistant Director  
Gretchen Adams, Director of Education
- The Children's Museum, Boston  
David Marino, Manger The Visitor Experience
- Harvard University Art Museums  
Lynne Stanton, Head, Public Education
- The Freedom Trail, self-guided tour of Boston focusing on the revolutionary time, includes sights and museums along the way  
Self-guided tour, published brochure outlines a wheelchair accessible route along the streets and the buildings that are accessible along the route
- Renee Wells, consultant to museums on access

Washington 20 – 23 March 2002

- Smithsonian Institute  
Beth Ziebarth, SI Accessibility Program,
- Association of Science –Technology Centres Incorporated  
Sally Middlebrooks, Director of Education Projects

Los Angeles 24 – 27 March

- Natural History Museum of LA County  
David Bock, Manager of Interpretive Education  
Sarah Thompson, Outreach Programs Manager  
Mary Jeanette Martz, access consultant on upcoming exhibition
- Los Angeles County Museum of Art  
Mary Jeanette Martz, Coordinating Consultant “Art for All”  
Gail Maxwell, Associate Educator, Asian Art Specialist

**Other museums visited include:**

Note: while no meetings were scheduled at the following organisations, a survey of access provision was carried out and access and program materials collected.

London

- National Portrait Gallery
- National Gallery
- The Mall Galleries
- Museum of London
- Tate Modern

Stockholm

- Nordiskamuseet
- Vasa Museet

New York

- Museum of American Folk Art
- Brooklyn Museum of Art
- Brooklyn Children’s Museum
- Manhattan Children’s Museum
- New York Public Library
- American Craft Museum
- Merchants House

## Boston

- Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum
- Museum of Immigration, Boston
- Old State Meeting House
- Boston Public Library

## Washington

- Textile Museum
- all Smithsonian Institute Museums

## Los Angeles

- Japanese American Museum
- Museum of Contemporary Art
- Adobe House
- George C Page Tar Pit Discoveries

## **Appendix 3      Bibliography**

Accessible Arts NSW  
[www.aarts.net.au](http://www.aarts.net.au)

Association of Science - Technology Centres, Inc.  
[www.astc.org](http://www.astc.org)

Australian Bureau of Statistics  
[www.abs.gov.au](http://www.abs.gov.au)

Commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act 1992

Davidson, Betty 1991 New Dimensions for Traditional Dioramas: Multisensory Additions for Access, Interest and Learning, Museum of Science, Boston

Department of Aging, Disability and Home Care  
[www.add.nsw.gov.au](http://www.add.nsw.gov.au)

Department of Family and Community Services  
[www.facs.gov.au](http://www.facs.gov.au)

Department for Work and Pensions  
[www.disability.gov.uk](http://www.disability.gov.uk)

Disability in the Arts, Disadvantage in the Arts, Australia (DADAA)  
[www.dadaanat.net.au](http://www.dadaanat.net.au)

Graphic Artists Guild  
[www.gag.org/resource/das](http://www.gag.org/resource/das)  
(for information and downloadable examples of international access symbols)

Gration, Nolene 1998 Disability Fact Pack, joint project of DADAA, the Australia Council, Arts Access and presented in partnership with State and Territory arts agencies, edited by Lynn Buchanan

Majewski, Janice 1987 Part of Your General Public is Disabled: a handbook for Guides in Museums, Zoos and Historic Houses, Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington

McGinnis, Rebecca, 1998, The Disability Discrimination Act: 1998 Update, in association with the Museums and Galleries Commission

Museums Association  
[www.museumsassociation.org](http://www.museumsassociation.org)

Museums and Galleries Disability Association  
[www.magda.org](http://www.magda.org)

National Endowment for the Arts  
[www.endow.gov](http://www.endow.gov)

Nolan, Gail 1997 Designing Exhibitions to Include People with Disabilities: a practical guide, The National Museums of Scotland, Edinburgh

NSW Disability Services Act 1993

NSW Heritage Act, 1978

NSW Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1999

Resource, the Council for Museums, Libraries and Archives  
[www.resource.gov.uk](http://www.resource.gov.uk)

Royal National Institute for the Blind, See it Right, guidelines for making print accessible for publications, signs, web sites, etc

Smithsonian Guidelines for Accessible Exhibition Design, Smithsonian Accessibility Program

Smithsonian Guidelines for Accessible Publication Design, Smithsonian Accessibility Program

US Census Bureau  
[www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov)