

Department of Human Services  
GPO Box 292  
Adelaide SA 5001  
[DHSdisabilityinclusionact@sa.gov.au](mailto:DHSdisabilityinclusionact@sa.gov.au)

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Dear Sir / Madam

### **Submission to the Review of the Disability Inclusion Act 2018 (SA)**

Community Centres SA (CCSA) is the peak body supporting 103 Community Centres and another 80 allied community organisations in SA. We are part of a network of over 1000 community centres and neighbourhood houses across Australia.

We have a 40-year history working from a foundation of community development to support centres and other community spaces to be inclusive, diverse, and open and accessible for all. We believe in creating stronger and more connected communities where individuals are empowered to participate fully in life, to feel valued and to have a sense of belonging.

Our sector supports the intent of the Disability Inclusion Act 2018 (SA) to

- promote full inclusion within the South Australian community of people with disability
- support and enhance the ability of people with disability to achieve their full potential as equal citizens, and
- promote the wellbeing of people with disability through social inclusion.

Our submission is based on the collective experiences of our sector – their strengths and challenges – in bringing the Act to life in local communities across SA.

As a first step in operationalising the Act to achieve inclusiveness, CCSA recommends the Act include greater alignment with the themes of the State Disability Inclusion Plan:

- Inclusive communities for all
- Leadership and collaboration
- Accessible communities
- Learning and employment

### **INTRODUCTION TO COMMUNITY CENTRES**

Each week, over 35,000 people are in contact with Community Centres across South Australia contributing over 20,000 volunteering hours.

Community Centres are important places of information, connection, support, participation, learning and contribution within their communities.

They offer opportunities for this through informal approaches – quiet spaces to enjoy, drop-in-coffee-and-chat gatherings, community meals, community garden spaces and community events –

and more formally through the delivery of programs, services, and volunteering. They are a valuable hub for bringing people together and facilitating and supporting connection in local communities.

There are a range of community centre models across SA, ranging from Council-owned and managed to Community-owned and managed with volunteer Boards, and hybrid models in between. On average, 1.5 staff members and 40 volunteers contribute to the day to day running of Community Centres.

## HOW PEOPLE WITH DISABILITY EXPERIENCE COMMUNITY CENTRES

Centres are viewed as non-judgemental, non-stigmatised, safe places that are community-oriented, and enable people to participate at their own pace<sup>1</sup>.

“You don’t have to tell them your life stories, or give them your birthdate or government ID or your gender or employment status ... It doesn’t matter. No stigma. Nothing. There’s lots of things here where you can just be”. Community Centre user, 2019

Many host disability-specific groups such as NDIS-approved programs and GROW mental health support groups for example. However, the inclusive culture of Community Centres welcomes people of all abilities to participate in their full range of programs and activities. People with disabilities – physical, intellectual, cognitive, and psychological – contribute to the inclusive, welcoming and safe culture of Centres, both as participants and as valued volunteers.

Centres understand the barriers can that limit a person’s ability to participate in everyday opportunities. People who are socially isolated, including people with a disability, can find it difficult to build meaningful connections with others independently.

Community Centres have demonstrated long-standing expertise at providing ‘social scaffolding’<sup>2</sup> support, to build the skills and confidence for individuals to meaningfully participate in opportunities at their local community centre, and in the wider community<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Mackenzie, C. Louth, J. & Goodwin-Smith, I. (June 2019). “I feel a sense of belonging here” – An investigation into the experiences of Community Centre users in South Australia, research report prepared by the Australian Alliance for Social Enterprise, University of South Australia for the South Australian Department of Human Services

<sup>2</sup> Haslam, C (2018) ‘Scaffolding a stronger society’. *the psychologist*. Vol.31, 44-47 [online] Available at: <https://thepsychologist.bps.org.uk/volume-31/may-2018/scaffolding-stronger-society> [Accessed 16 Jul. 2019]

<sup>3</sup> Personal Support Program Project 2014-2018, designed and managed by CCSA and funded by the then Department for Industry and Skills. The project targeted people over the age of 17 who had been unemployed for over 12 months and had not completed Year 12 or equivalent. Between 2014 and 2018, the project recruited 261 participants and developed individual support plans and pathways to education, employment, and community connection. At the end of the program, of the 261 participants 59% were engaged in formal training, 28.35% were engaged in sustained volunteering, and 17.25% had achieved employment. The project demonstrated the value of scaffolding to support those facing barriers to access and participation in education and employment pathways. Aaron’s Journey is a case study from this Program which was defunded in spite of it’s significant success in achieving ‘inclusion outcomes’.

Aaron's Journey - Surviving to Thriving <https://www.communitycentressa.asn.au/about-us/stories-from-our-communities>

Aaron was diagnosed with extreme social anxiety and was unable to go outside. He had lived with this for 10 years when he was referred to the Personal Support Program at his local Community Centre. He initially began meeting his support worker outside. Aaron eventually became confident to meet inside the Centre, introducing him to a range of opportunities to consider when he was ready. He began volunteering in the community garden which gave him a focus outside of his home life and helped grow his confidence in talking to people. With the ongoing assistance from his support worker and the flexible and nurturing environment of the community centre, over time, Aaron completed a literacy course, gained confidence to use public transport to help him participate in further training in construction, gained his licence, purchased a car using Sheppard micro-loans, and secured employment.

*"To the people who have supported me, I want to say thank you for all your help and*

## COMMUNITY CENTRES, THE ACT & THE STATE DISABILITY INCLUSION PLAN

Those already connected with Community Centres know them to be vibrant, welcoming, and inclusive hubs of activity and social connection.

An ongoing challenge for Community Centres is ensuring they are representative of their local communities. It is integral for Centres to hear from all voices in their community to remain relevant and responsive as local populations change, and to continue to foster community connectedness. This need is accentuated with 1 in 4 people reporting feeling lonely in Australia<sup>4</sup> (now 1 in 2 due to the Coronavirus pandemic).

As the peak body for our sector, CCSA continues to build the capacity of the sector to evolve its response to inclusion, addressing:

- the building and surrounding space of community centres
- the capacity of staff and volunteers to be champions of inclusion in their interactions at the Centre
- the delivery of activities, programs and events that support the inclusion of all in the community, and
- a commitment to developing a collaborative community network with a lens to social inclusion embedded within each organisation's service delivery role.

Our submission presents sector strengths by highlighting some of our work under the themes and priorities of the Disability Inclusion Action Plan. It also speaks to the challenges we face and makes recommendations for a stronger connection between the Act and the Plan that allow for recognition and investment of local community assets such as the community centre sector, to implement the intent of the Act, and priorities in the Plan with a place-based community development focus across SA.

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<sup>4</sup> Psychweek.org.au. (2018). Australian Loneliness Report. [online] Available at: <https://psychweek.org.au/wp/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Psychology-Week-2018-Australian-Loneliness-Report.pdf>

## OUR STRENGTHS & CHALLENGES IN OPERATIONALISING THE ACT

Below are examples of some of the work we do, presented under the key themes of the State Disability Inclusion Plan. We also highlight the challenges that impact on achieving inclusiveness for people with a disability.

### State Disability Inclusion Plan Theme 1 & 3: Inclusive Communities for all; Accessible Communities

#### *CCSA and Sector Strengths -*

#### *Inclusivity & Accessibility Audit, Amping Up Disability Inclusion, and Placemaking*

CCSA undertook an inclusiveness audit of Centres to identify barriers to access and participation. The audit looked at safety, physical access, digital access, the inclusiveness of language and images on signage etc. in the surrounding outdoor space.

Many Community Centres were identified as having built-form barriers to inclusion that impacted on a person's understanding of what the Centre was, what it offered to community, and who was welcomed inside. This audit led to the following CCSA-led initiatives:

- **Amping Up Disability Inclusion Pilot Project**  
A collaboration with 2 Community Centres, and an advisory group comprised of people with disabilities and local disability service providers. It focused on building the capacity of centres (staff, volunteers and resources) to be better able to respond to the particular needs of people with disabilities who visit their Centres. A key outcome of this project was a commitment to strengthening relationships with service providers, offering opportunities to disability day options participants. This subsequently led to individual group members developing their own connections with the Centre and participating in their broader range of programs.
- **Placemaking**  
Traditionally, the focus of community centres has been on the social fabric and what happens inside the centres. However, the physical fabric of the spaces surrounding the centres themselves strongly influence the centre's accessibility, opportunity for social connection, and visitation across day and night.

Many centres exhibit poorly located signage, unengaging entries, uninspiring building form and material, inappropriate size, and type of landscaping that hinders a sense of safety, fencing/pathways/carparks that don't support movement patterns of mobility impaired, and in general, the built form does not speak of diversity in culture, reflect history or opportunity.

Community Centres SA has worked with 20 community centres across metropolitan and regional SA to identify and address barriers to inclusiveness and physically transform their buildings and surrounding outdoor spaces through 'Placemaking'. Placemaking is a participatory process of co-design with the community that turns ordinary spaces into places people want to visit and connect with. A particular focus of the project was reaching people who had not yet visited their local community centre, including people with a disability, to encourage their participation and sense of ownership and belonging in their local community centre. With a small amount of allocated funding (\$7,000/Centre from the Department of Human Services), centres were able to address a range of small-scale projects like improved signage, wayfinding to entranceways, opportunities for informal engagement like outdoor seating, grow carts, community gardens, and vibrant and inclusive community murals with welcoming messages to all in the community.

Participating Centres as a collective were able to reach 1,015 people across the 20 locations through the creative engagement and co-design process and various launch events. This included first-time Centre users and community members from identified target groups, including people with a disability.

### *Challenges*

A lack of funding has meant that CCSA has not been able to continue to roll-out the Amping Up Project at additional Centres, or partner with the remaining 80 Community Centres in SA to build their capacity in creating more inclusive environments and practices. This is despite both projects proving successful in engaging people with disability in opportunities for participation, connection and creating a sense of ownership of their local Community Centre.

## **State Disability Inclusion Plan Theme 2: Leadership & Collaboration**

### *CCSA & Sector Strength - Community Connections*

Community Connections is a new DHS-funded program that seeks to build an individual's capacity across 12 weeks, specifically to tackle loneliness within Communities.

As the state-wide capacity builder for the program, CCSA supports a multiple organisation approach, facilitating collaborative responses to individual and community needs across all local government areas (LGAs).

Its uniqueness is the 'no-wrong door' approach that all partners adopt when working with individual community members. CCSA has advocated for and trained organisations in a person-centred, asset-based community development approach, building the capacity of organisations to collaborate in responding to a participant's goals, in a way that promotes seamless wrap-around service-delivery and equally importantly, inclusion and connection within their local community.

For some participants, the program has allowed them to take the first step through the door of a community centre, free from judgment or stigma, where they are not identified by their disability or as a 'service recipient'. For some members of the community, simply having a practitioner taking the time to talk through their options and connect them to a group or activity has proven life changing!

### *Challenges*

One of the challenges for Community Connection in delivering on the intentions of the Act in service delivery is ensuring community assets work in collaboration, so that individuals and communities have the capacity to reach their full potential. Through our work supporting the 'no-wrong door' approach, CCSA is connecting services and organisations across the state, focused on a shared goal, to increase social inclusion. This has taken a dedicated resource to build the capacity across services to adopt a community development approach to their work, moving away from a service-delivery mentality where the expert professional fixes the individual's problem, and encourages organisation to work together with individuals within the context of their local community, recognising their strengths and building their formal and informal networks to create long-lasting change after services withdraw. This way of working takes time to bring stakeholder partners with you, and time to build trusted relationships with participants, to understand their goals and aspirations beyond a streamlined intake process developed for service efficiency.

## **State Disability Inclusion Plan Theme 4: Learning & Employment**

### *CCSA & Sector Strength - Community Learning*

For over 20 years, Community Centres have done some of the heaviest lifting as adult education providers within a community learning environment. We are experts in developing and delivering

a range of education and employment pathway courses – literacy, numeracy, digital literacy (which can also incorporate peer training programs), readiness for work courses, driving for work courses, and contextualised industry courses including ageing and disability and small business development, are just some examples.

Our Community Learning commitment offers a local context and unique delivery model with wrap-around support services. This has meant that many of the most vulnerable members of our community – people who experience barriers to accessing services and opportunities to fully participate in society, including people with disability – have been able to access foundation skills training and other courses as a pathway toward further education, employment, volunteering, and social connectedness in their local communities.

CCSA responded to recent State Government policy and funding redirections in adult education that threatened the ongoing and valuable role the sector plays in delivering accessible and inclusive learning opportunities to people with a disability. Through a pilot partnership funded by the Department for Innovation and Skills, CCSA and 10 Community Centres continue to develop and deliver foundations skills training with supportive leadership, infrastructure, and reporting mechanisms for Centres, and one-to-one support for learners, empowering them in making decisions about their future with regards to further training and employment pathways, and other opportunities for social connection and civic participation.

### *CCSA & Sector Challenges*

The Community Learning team encounter various challenges when delivering programs across the State that impact on how inclusive the programs are to people with a disability. This is despite the demonstrated success of the Community Centre environment in delivering training with a person-centred, holistic approach.

These challenges include a lack of:

- disability access to Community Centre buildings and their amenities – kitchen, toilet facilities and small, inflexible meeting room spaces (due to buildings not being built-for-purpose)
- training equipment – large screen, laptops, iPads that can be used for assistive technology
- ergonomic furniture that can create tailored learning spaces to the needs of the learner
- Other assistive technology devices for diverse communication needs
- interpreter budgets in the funding of programs, for Auslan interpreters for example.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Community Centres SA acknowledges the social model of disability<sup>5</sup> - that people are disabled by barriers in society such as buildings, not having a ramp or accessible toilets, attitudes and language that are deficit-based, and seeing people with a disability with a homogenous identity.

As a sector, Community Centres do a tremendous job with the limited resources they have as they work alongside their communities toward a just society where everyone has a right to equal participation, to have a sense of belonging, of cultural safety, to feel comfortable being themselves. A commitment to community development, strengths-based practice and community connectedness are powerful tools to create inclusive communities, however the infrastructure, technology and resource limitations make other barriers immovable for Community Centres.

An increased funding commitment (for capital works infrastructure improvements, updated technology, assistive technology devices, improved amenities and increased human resources) would enable the Community Centre sector to work with government departments, to deliver on

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.afdo.org.au/social-model-of-disability/>



the themes and priorities outlined in the State Disability Inclusion Plan, to operationalise the objectives of the State Disability Inclusion Act.

Community Centre funding in other States provide useful benchmarks for comparison. One hundred percent (100%) of every other State's Community Centres, except South Australia, receive baseline funding. In Victoria, all 400 Centres receive between \$85k - \$120k. Victoria's State Government annual funding commitment is approximately \$40 million (excluding funding to the peak). In Tasmania, the State funds all 34 Centres approximately \$156,000 per Centre, with a commitment of increase of \$5.7 million – bringing State funding to approximately \$10.5 million. In SA, only 50% receive baseline funding. Of those that do receive some core funding, there is great diversity in how much funding is received, from just a few thousand annually, to into the hundreds of thousands<sup>6</sup>.

## Recommendations

In conclusion, to operationalise the State Disability Inclusion Act, CCSA recommends that the following be considered as part of the review:

1. Strengthen the Act's relationship to the themes and priorities outlined in the State Disability Inclusion Plan
  - Inclusive communities for all
  - Leadership and collaboration
  - Accessible communities
  - Learning and employment.
2. Consider the significant role of grass roots organisations such as the Community Centre sector in creating inclusive communities and providing opportunities for full civic participation including social inclusion and learning and employment for people with a disability.
3. Acknowledge that the implementation of the Act requires State government departments to partner with, and appropriately resource, the Community Centre Sector as a key stakeholder in creating inclusive and socially connected communities at the local level across the State for people with a disability.
4. Acknowledge that the implementation of the Act requires a commitment to an additional pool of funding for the Community Centre Sector to address barriers to inclusiveness created by society (lack of accessible infrastructure, internal building amenities, technology including assisted technology, resources such as Auslan interpreter funds etc.).

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this process. Please contact me if you would like to discuss our submission further.

Yours sincerely



Ms Kylie Fergusen

CEO

8371 4622

[kfergusen@communitycentressa.asn.au](mailto:kfergusen@communitycentressa.asn.au)

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<sup>6</sup> <https://communitycentressa.asn.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/South-Australian-Election-Campaign-2022-Final.pdf>

