



Wednesday, 5 October 2011, 1:30 pm.

## **Roundtable 13: Who put the dis in disability?**

### Speakers

**Gaelle Mellis**, Resident Designer, Restless Dance Theatre, Australia

**Emma Bennison**, Chair, Arts Access Australia and Executive Officer, Access Arts QLD, Australia

**Kate Larsen**, CEO, Arts Access, Australia

### Moderator

**Becky Llewellyn**, Director, Disability Consultancy Services, Australia

### Rapporteur

**Michelle Hall**, Client Manager, Australia Council for the Arts

## **Description of the session**

This session focused on recognising the value of disability arts as arts with its own power. The two identified strands to be addressed were building infrastructures (remove barriers) and creative intention (providing opportunities e.g. curation, producing, employment).

The speakers stated that there needs to be a shift in thinking re policy development – e.g. it is an opportunity to harness rather than a problem to solve. Disability needs to be inclusive of any process both infrastructure and creative intention. It is important to be part of the conversation at the beginning as this ensures more cost effective and holistic outcomes. It is harder to build in accessibility afterwards for both processes.

Other issues disputed were related to inclusion and its 'costs'. Infrastructure costs for example increase access for many other potential audiences such as young mothers with prams, ageing population. It is investment in audience development and engagement. The outcomes outweigh the costs. As diversity is acknowledged and embraced it will enhance and change the arts experience.

The speakers concluded that one solution is employment at all levels so people increase engagement, understanding and are contributing to conversation at all levels of arts practice. There need to be clear pathways for career advancement.

### **Creative intersections discussed in the session**

- A key message of this panel was not to set up parallel universes but to set up partnerships to increase creative processes and outputs such as employment and engagement.
- Have the conversation – build inclusiveness into policy, planning and budgets @ the instigation, no add ons, it will fuel other benefits and increase the impact of the partnership and longer term benefits.
- There needs to be international intersections - Isolation from peers affects growth of the practice and the sector

### **Examples of good examples and practices**

- Arts Council of England – changed happened due to tightening of regulation and this impact upon universities and training institutions lead to more people with disability seeking opportunities. Also diversity unit within Arts Council of England, supports , converses, plans and commits over a sustained period of time and it makes existing funding accessible.
- UK Model is a social model, inclusive- it's about the person and the arts, a place to be you, not justify why and not feel the problem is yours.
- Canada is further expanding this concept through their policy and program areas. They are undertaking more pro actively in this area with the overriding concept of equity, as endorsed by the sector. They have seen an increase in awareness and advancement for the sector when aligned with other communities rather than advocating solo.
- Croatia also works under the banner of equity – with 70% employment being people with a disability and proactive policies in place.

### **Identified problems**

- Less 'bless' mentality –'*Less apathy more proactivity*'
- Lack of conversation
- Lack of leadership opportunities for people with a disability.
- Lack of lateral thinking and collaboration.
- Lack of support both people and budget for development of models, training, mentoring.

### **Recommendations for future actions**

- Leadership programs
- International exchange and opportunities.
- Increase in employment as creatives and managers.
- Documentation of examples, Social media campaigns to challenge and change perceptions.

- Access requirement forms included in employment and events.

### **Other additional comments**

- *'Artists with a disability need to be seen and valued as contributors not as a requirement.'*
- *'Place the same expectation as you would anyone else, as long as the barriers are removed. Don't perpetuate the myth that people with a disability can't meet expectations, they can actually exceed.'*
- *'Ask not what you can do for artists with a disability but what artists with a disability can do for you.'*