

A City for Everyone: Draft Inclusive Brisbane Plan 2019-2029

Submission to Brisbane City Council

February 2019

Introduction

The Public Advocate was established under the Guardianship and Administration Act 2000 (Qld) to promote and protect the rights and interests of Queensland adults with impaired decision-making capacity through systemic advocacy.

More specifically, the Public Advocate has the following functions:

- promoting and protecting the rights of adults with impaired capacity for a matter;
- promoting the protection of the adults from neglect, exploitation or abuse;
- promoting the development of programs to help the adults reach the greatest practicable degree of autonomy;
- promoting the provision of services and facilities for the adults; and
- monitoring and reviewing the delivery of services and facilities to the adults¹.

'Having capacity' means a person is capable of understanding the nature and effect of decisions about a matter, can freely and voluntarily make decisions about it and can communicate their decisions in some way. There are a number of conditions that may impact a person's decision-making capacity. These include, but are not limited to, intellectual disability, acquired brain injuries, mental illness, neurological disorders (such as dementia) or problematic alcohol and drug use.

The Public Advocate welcomes the opportunity to make this submission, responding to *A City for Everyone: Draft Inclusive Brisbane Plan 2019-2029*.

Theme 1: Connect

The Inclusive Brisbane Plan's connect goal to create "a city where everyone moves around safely and easily" is supported. Transport is fundamental to connecting people to opportunity and their community. In particular, transport enables people to access employment and enjoy social participation. Barriers to accessing and using transport reduce the capacity of people with disability and their families to participate in community life².

In mid-2018, the Queensland Government removed the annual and replacement fees associated with the Translink Access Pass. This meant that people with significant permanent or intellectual disability who can travel independently but may have trouble touching on or off with a go card can now travel without charge³.

Although this is a very positive development, other people with disability, who do not have difficulties touching on and off public transport, are only eligible for the concessional rate for people with disability using public transport in Queensland, which is 75% of the full ticket price. Again, while this concession is helpful, it is still a significant impost for people with disability, considering the median gross personal income for people with disability aged between 15 and 64 years is less than half that for people with no reported disability⁴. While ticket pricing is a Queensland Government responsibility, Brisbane City Council (BCC) plays an important lobbying and advocacy role in this area. The inclusion plan could therefore recognise that the cost of public transport travel is a significant barrier to accessibility for people with disability and commit to raising this issue with the Queensland Government in budgetary and planning processes.

Aside from cost, the physical accessibility of public transport options is also critical, for people with disability, including transport routes being appropriately connected (eg. accessible walking paths

¹ *Guardianship and Administration Act 2000 (Qld) s 209.*

² National People with Disabilities and Carer Council, *Shut Out: The experience of people with disabilities and their families in Australia*, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, Canberra, ACT, 2009 available at https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/05_2012/nds_report.pdf.

³ M Bailey (Minister for Transport and Main Roads), C O'Rourke (Minister for Communities and Minister for Disability Services and Seniors), *Fees cut for passengers with a disability*, media release, The Queensland Cabinet and Ministerial Directory, 27 July 2018.

⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistics, 'Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers: Summary of Findings 2015, Cat. No.4430.0 (2016).



to the bus that then connects with the train or ferry via another accessible path) to make journeys simple and easy to complete.

It is pleasing to note the work already undertaken by BCC to provide a fully accessible bus fleet and undertake a program of upgrades to ferry terminals and bus stops to improve accessibility.

It is also encouraging that BCC has recognised that fear and anxiety⁵ is a barrier associated with accessing public transport and are considering initiatives for people with disability to build their confidence, including ways to advise passengers when the next bus is approaching and, when on board, to identify upcoming stops.

Theme 2: Work

The Public Advocate supports the inclusion of the 'Work' theme in the plan, which aspires to people of all ages, abilities and cultural backgrounds being able to access employment opportunities and participate in the economy.

In addition to encouraging diversity and accessibility in the commercial business environment, BCC is also committed to providing additional employment programs to increase the diversity of the Council's staff, particularly representation by seniors, people with disability and those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

As one of Queensland's largest employers, it is important that the BCC's workforce reflects diversity and promotes inclusion.

To date, most government disability employment policy has focused on providing employers with financial incentives that reduce the financial cost of employing people with disability. These policies have been costly and of limited benefit to those seeking employment. For example, the Commonwealth Government's Supported Wage System reduces the barriers for employers by directly reducing the income of the employee with disability based on a productivity ratio. This policy perpetuates an incorrect perception that people with disabilities are a burden for employers for which they should be compensated.

In November 2016, the Public Advocate made a submission to the Department of Social Services in relation to disability employment services⁶. The submission highlighted the need for government policy to focus on supporting the individual seeking employment, rather than simplifying processes at the expense of choice and control for people seeking employment⁷. Moving towards an employee-focused employment policy will set the stage for more cost effective approaches that build demand for employees with disability and drive towards a competitive disability employment service market.

Two examples of alternative policies in this area that have worked include;

- Chinese government policy which features an employment quota where people with disability must account for at least 1.5% of a company's workforce for the company to avoid being imposed with a levy for failing to meet the quota. The proceeds of the levy are channelled into funding non-government organisations that deliver disability policy interventions, such as training, employment support and assistance⁸.
- A pilot program launched in 2015 by Microsoft in the USA, which sought to actively hire people on the autism spectrum⁹. The recruitment process employed by the company was adapted from initial phone screenings or long one-on-one interviews to a combination of workshops and interviews designed to help put candidates at ease and therefore allow them to more fully demonstrate their skills. The company consequently hired 11 new employees with autism and

⁵ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers: Summary of Findings 2015*, Cat. No.4430.0 (2016),

⁶ Office of the Public Advocate (Qld), Submission to Department of Human Services, *Disability Employment Services Reform*, 16 December 2016.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Karen Fischer, 'How China trumps Australia when it comes to supporting disabled workers', *The Sydney Morning Herald* (online), 4 January 2017 <<https://www.smh.com.au/comment/how-china-trumps-australia-when-it-comes-to-supporting-disabled-workers-20170103-gtl7bh.html>>.

⁹ Susan Muldowney, 'Improving job opportunities for people with a disability', *In the Black*, 01 June 2017, <<https://www.intheblack.com/articles/2017/06/01/job-opportunities-people-with-disability>>.



continues to seek candidates with autism for roles associated with software engineering and data science.

Although these approaches may not be the exact 'fit' for BCC to increase staff diversity and inclusion, they indicate that there are a range of alternative strategies to address this issue. BCC is encouraged to consider alternative strategies such as these.

Theme 3: Live

Consistent with the other themes articulated in the plan, I support BBC's overall vision in this area, where people of all ages, abilities and cultures will have equal access to facilities and open spaces to enrich their lives. An important aspect of this theme, is BBC's role in facilitating inclusion beyond services and facilities under its control and empowering developers and community groups to develop facilities that appeal to all and support Brisbane's housing options so residents can age in place.

It is anticipated that BBC will work with the Queensland Government to ensure that efforts in this area are integrated and aligned with relevant State Government plans including the *Queensland Age Friendly Community Action Plan* and *The Queensland Plan*.

Theme 4: Enjoy

The Public Advocate welcomes the BCC's goal for people of all ages, abilities and cultures to have access to events, local markets and potential new initiatives including accessible sports hubs to provide professional facilities for emerging and elite athletes of all abilities.

In particular, the use of available technologies like live streaming and virtual and/or augmented reality experiences of programs are supported, as they enhance program and event accessibility to those who may not be able to physically attend or actively participate.

Making events accessible is also about the experience they have when they attend, including whether they are accepted, valued and appreciated by others.

With this in mind, it is suggested that the Plan include actions associated with enhancing community awareness and understanding of inclusive communities and their role in welcoming and including others. The 2015 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Disability Ageing and Carers Australia Survey reported that almost one in 12 Australians with disability aged 15 years and over had experienced discrimination or unfair treatment because of their disability over the preceding 12 months. Consequently, more than one third of women with disability and over one quarter of men with disability over 15 years have actively avoided situations because of their disability¹⁰. This potentially includes local events and programs.

The Queensland Government in its *Age Friendly Community Strategy*¹¹ has recognised this issue for seniors (under the 'Respect and social inclusion' strategy) and is proposing to:

- educate the community on the value of older people;
- provide better information and communication about community activities available to older people so they are able to participate; and
- include older people more.

Actions to achieve these goals include; the delivery of Seniors Week, funding programs and services to reduce the social isolation of older Queenslanders, and funding projects and organisations to provide specific art, cultural and sporting events and activities for seniors. This includes a range of Queensland Art Gallery and Gallery of Modern Art programs for those 50+, and the Reminiscence Program at the Cobb and Co campus in Toowoomba, where collection objects

¹⁰ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers: Summary of Findings 2015*, Cat. No.4430.0 (2016),

¹¹ Department of Communities, Disability Services and Seniors, *Action Plan: Queensland: an age friendly community 2016* < <https://www.communities.qld.gov.au/resources/dcdss/seniors/age-friendly-community/qafc-action-plan.pdf> >



and photographs are used to encourage residents of aged care facilities to talk about their memories and share their stories.

There may be opportunity for the BCC to work with the State Government on joint initiatives in this area, as well as transferring the concepts and ideas for additional programs and services to other targeted cohorts within the community.

Theme 5: Engage

The final theme of the draft plan, Engage, is vital to the realisation of a just and inclusive society where the rights of all Queenslanders are upheld and their autonomy is respected. The participation of people with impaired decision-making capacity in civic decision making involves adopting processes for providing information that is physically and intellectually accessible as well as avenues for people with impaired capacity to have their voice heard.

In the area of information provision, there is potential for BCC to consider producing an easy read version of all documents and notices. The easy read format can assist people with learning disabilities to easily understand the information – it can also be helpful for other audiences, including members of the community who are not fluent in English.

Easy read provides essential information on a topic without a lot of background information and uses pictures to support the meaning of text. It can be used by a carer or support person to talk through a communication with someone with learning difficulties so that they can understand it¹².

Easy read concepts can also be used to inform community consultation activities to more effectively reach people with disability to ensure their views and opinions are heard. It can be used to assist in the design of effective questionnaires and workbooks for feedback as well as presentations and other material for community meetings and focus or discussion groups.

Monitoring the plan

Given that one of the overall goals of the plan is to enhance the inclusivity of mainstream services throughout the BCC area it will be particularly important to monitor the use of services by identified cohorts.

This process could be facilitated by a framework developed by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare in 2016, known as a Standardised Disability Flag for mainstream services. The framework includes a set of questions intended for use by all mainstream services in their data collection to identify people with disabilities or long term health conditions who experience difficulties and/or need assistance in various areas of their life. The data collection guide that accompanies the flag includes a step by step procedure to implement the flag within mainstream services. The flag was tested in 2013 via a series of focus groups, cognitive interviews and a pilot, and was subsequently refined for use by government agencies¹³.

Concluding comments

Overall, the Inclusive Brisbane Plan 2019-2029 appears to set the ambitious goals that are necessary to create and nourish truly inclusive communities into the future. As always, the true challenge associated with any plan of this nature lies with its implementation across the community. The inclusion of future possibilities in the plan, as opposed to fully resourced actions, will make this process more difficult, as there is not yet a commitment to the level of priority the plan will be given in the BCC operating environment.

¹² UK Department of Health, *Making written information easier to understand for people with learning disabilities*, Mental Health and Disability Division, Department of Health, London, England, 2010.

¹³ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Standardised Disability Flag: data collection guide*, Cat. no. DAT 6. Canberra, AIHW, 2016.



Thank you for the opportunity to participate in the Inclusive Brisbane Plan and provide feedback. Please contact the Public Advocate's office if you require any further information or would like to discuss any elements of this submission.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mary Burgess', written in a cursive style.

Mary Burgess

Public Advocate

