

Synod of Victoria & Tasmania

Disability Action Plan 2015-2018



Uniting Church in Australia
SYNOD OF VICTORIA AND TASMANIA

Find us on www.victas.uca.org.au/disability-inclusion

An Interfaith Litany for Wholeness

Leader: Let us pray for all God's people.

For people who are blind and cannot see, and for those who can see but are blind to people around them,

Response: God, in your mercy, help us touch each other.

Leader: For people who move slowly because of accident, illness or disability, and for those who move too fast to be aware of the world in which they live,

Response: God, in your mercy help us work together.

Leader: For people who are deaf and cannot hear, and for those who can hear but who ignore the cries of others,

Response: God, in your mercy help us respond to each other.

Leader: For people who learn slowly, for people who learn in different ways, and for people who learn quickly and easily but often choose ignorance,

Response: God, in your mercy help us grow in your wisdom.

Leader: For people who have chronic illnesses for which there is no known cure or relief, and for people who live in unholy fear of developing a chronic illness.

Response: God in your mercy help us and heal us.

Leader: For families, friends and care-givers who serve people with disabilities, and for those who feel awkward in their presence,

Response: God, in your mercy help us see each other with your eyes.

Leader: For people who think they are worthless and beyond your love, and for people who think they don't need your love.

Response: God, in your mercy help us accept your love.

Leader: For people who feel isolated by their disabilities, and for people who contribute to that sense of isolation,

Response: God, in your mercy, change our lives.

Leader: For all people in your creation that we may learn to respect each other and learn how to live together in your peace,

Response: God, in your mercy, bind us together.

All: Amen

Written by Rev. Kate Chipps and adapted by Ginny Thornburgh. Reproduced with permission from: ['That All May Worship - An Interfaith Welcome To People With Disabilities'](#)

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Moderator's message

Greetings.

It is both pleasing and disturbing to commend to you this Disability Action Plan of the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania, Uniting Church in Australia. Pleasing because it stands in the long tradition of the Uniting Church's faithful commitment to justice and compassion with people marginalised by disability. Pleasing also because this Plan builds on previous endeavours of the synod, outlining a way forward for us to continue responding in practical and creative ways to ensure people with disabilities can fully participate in the life of the Uniting Church. This is consistent with our call "to be a fellowship of reconciliation, a body within which the diverse gifts of its members are used for the building up of the whole, an instrument through which Christ may work and bear witness to himself" (*Basis of Union* Para 3).

On the other hand, it is disturbing that discrimination is an ongoing concern. It is important to note that the Uniting Church is not exempt from the requirements of the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992*. We need to address the issue in an intentional manner, and all areas of the Uniting Church need to be continually vigilant in pursuing the elimination of any discriminatory practices.

I want to encourage and challenge you. Encourage you to read this Plan, and challenge you to speak with another about your response. Think about your involvement in the life of the Uniting Church, and ask the question: "How might we improve what we are presently offering to ensure people with disabilities are fully participating?"

This Plan has been endorsed by the Board of the Commission for Mission, and it is also accessible on the synod's website at www.victas.uca.org.au I also draw your attention to a 23-minute DVD, called *?*, a multi-faith dialogue in which people with disabilities and leaders of faith communities talk about their experiences and how things can be improved. Go to www.victas.uca.org.au/disability-inclusion

I commend this Disability Action Plan 2015-18 to you for reading and response. On behalf of the synod I thank all contributors to the Plan for their diligent and faithful contribution to this most important work.

Yours in Christ,



Dan Wootton
Moderator
Synod of Victoria and Tasmania
Uniting Church in Australia

Disability Action Plan Convenor

At the heart of the goals and strategies of this Disability Action Plan, 2015 - 2018, is hospitality, and what takes place in a meal shared, a common experience or a journey together. This is one of our central calls as Christian communities. The writer of Hebrews reminds us that 'in welcoming and entertaining strangers, we welcome angels without knowing it' (Hebrews 13:2).

An Action Plan does have implications, legal and otherwise, that are being asked or required of us. Our minds may turn to questions of property alterations and costs involved. While we cannot avoid some of the economic implications of being an 'accessible' community, there is renewed hope and energy for the vision if approached from the motif of hospitality. We are invited to consider the ways in which those known to us, or not so well known to us, can access a faith community. How do we find each other? What attitudes and values will be encountered? Are there roadblocks – physical, attitudinal, emotional and historical – which effect the ability to be communities of hospitality?

In the development of the Action Plan, consultations were held throughout the synod in a range of formats: questionnaires and/or information were circulated to congregations via presbyteries, to UnitingCare's Early Years Cluster and community service agencies, and to Uniting Church schools. In addition to feedback from the networks of the InterCultural Unit, an on-line survey monkey elicited a range of feedback, and conversations were held with the First Peoples Disability Network and Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress. This Action Plan complements the strategies of access and equity already undertaken by a number of congregations and service providers of the Uniting Church, and challenges us to continue our vigilance. This Plan also includes Easy English descriptions, based on people's personal experience of seeking connection with a faith community.

This Action Plan will be submitted to the federal Human Rights Commission, as a sign of the Uniting Church's commitment to finding intentional means of eliminating discrimination towards people with disabilities. Supplementary information 'History of the Uniting Church and Disability', 'Disability and Discrimination', 'Disability Experiences, Barriers and Attitudes' have also been produced. All content of the Plan will also be available on the Synod's website at www.victas.uca.org.au.

On behalf of the Commission for Mission, thank you to everyone who has contributed to the development of this work. The prayer and hope is that hospitality in the name of the Uniting Church always finds 'the stranger being entertained in our midst'.

Yours in ministry,



Rev. (Deacon) Andy Calder
Disability Inclusion

Theological Background

The theology of disability is central to our understanding of what it means to know who God is and to know what it means to be a human being living fully under God.

In this bold claim by John Swinton¹, he notes that writings about disability theology arise from the spectrum of theological disciplines: biblical studies, systematic theology, Christian ethics, church history and practical theology.

In developing an action plan, what is the purpose?

Many organisations will implement an *action plan* to ensure equality for people with a disability. Others will perhaps create a plan simply to stave off complaints and legal action.

When it comes to the church, the mandate clearly represents universal justice and equity. The Hebrew prophets were particularly concerned about justice for people on the margins of society, those who were ignored because of stigma and difference. The New Testament carried that message of justice – illustrated by the stories of hospitality in which Jesus was either guest or host.

While hospitality is about welcoming a person into our midst, it is also about recognising the *person's living reality*. It means validating *that person's world*. Among other things, this entails being sensitive to their situation, without being embarrassed by it; being empathetic without condescending; being there with another person without intruding into their independence. It also means anticipating the areas of possible discrimination and exclusion in order to ensure the church does not become the 'disabler'.

This is not simply a call for generosity of spirit, though that is assumed, but it is a call for structural justice. For instance, the prophets were not simply concerned with the plight of the poor and the widow; they were concerned about the societal structures that oppressed vulnerable members. They avoided blaming the victim and instead asked the more radical question – what is wrong with a system that allows injustice to persist?

The question is: *in what ways does a system maintain discrimination against people with disabilities?*

What is it about the structures of the church that maintain discrimination towards people with disabilities in the life of the faith community? It is about the culture and attitudes that perpetuate discrimination. It is not only a case of better physical access to church buildings; it is also about how the church goes about developing policy, planning and programming. It is about the theology of the church.

The theological basis for the church's attitude is deeper than simple hospitality. It goes to the root of how we understand God.

Many people labelled by disability experience life as living 'outside the mainstream'. That means living outside the 'norms' of society. As Kerrie Thorne says:

As a person with a disability I have to define my own way. I have to work out what I value, what I'm trying to do with my life, what quality of life or hope I have. Often what I come up with may not be looked upon as worthwhile to others - it can be quite an individual thing.²

Therefore, the word *achievement* takes on a new meaning. While society measures achievement in terms of a hierarchy of skills, knowledge, or wealth, the person with a disability may view achievement in other ways. Our society places a high value on achievement, whether it is in work, skills or sport. And for many it is through the competition to achieve and win that they seek their identity. This excludes many people with disabilities.

Assumptions about what is normal can also be oppressive. Image-makers have much to answer for in our society, not to mention the economic system that fuels it. Such pressures to conform exclude many in society.

On this basis, the person with a *disability stands over and against* many of the norms and expectations of our culture. Excluded from this culture of achievement, disability confronts it. As well as struggling with questions surrounding *disability*, the church also needs to wrestle with its understanding of *able-ness*.

If we understand God as being able to do anything, then we will probably define people on the basis of their *able-ness*. What do we mean by the words “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matthew 5:48)? Traditionally, God’s perfection has to do with God’s complete, all-knowing, all-powerful character. God is absolute, completely independent. In this respect the command for us to be perfect is impossible. To use the word ‘perfect’ is, however, a misreading of the text. It is more likely that Jesus is asking us to love as he loved, to be “all inclusive, as your heavenly parent is all-inclusive”.³

The notion of perfection is often equated with the life and death of Christ. Here God is the God who is emptied and takes on the form of a slave and becomes obedient to the point of death (Philippians 2:7). This is not the God who exploited completeness, power, or independence; rather, the God who loved, even unto death. If there is one message that runs through both the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament, it is about the faithfulness of God’s love. This is what perfection is about. This is when God is most complete.

However, critique of the ‘perfection’ notion, when it creates standards of normality and beauty, is appropriate. As German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer has said, “the Bible directs us to the powerlessness and suffering of God; only a suffering God can help”.⁴ God conquers not through mighty power but through weakness. It is the *disabled God*⁵ on the cross who suffers with and for us. God becomes the suffering companion who understands the suffering of the other. It is the suffering God who most speaks to our human reality, for behind the suffering there is the proof of God’s love.

It is from this understanding of God as the suffering and loving God, that, as Christians and as a church, we can best address the situation of people with disabilities. People are seen not in terms of ‘able-ness’ but in terms of how God loved on the cross. In a particular sense God sees the world in the way the person with a disability experiences it. The challenge comes from the parable of the last judgment (Matthew 25:31-46). God is present in a very concrete way in the stranger, the poor and the hungry.

If we are to take our place as a church, we too must be outside the mainstream, for we are in the world but not of it. The task of the church is not to necessarily bring the person with a disability into the world of the church, but rather to see that person as one in God’s world, a world we share with each other; a world that espouses the value of suffering love above all else. Achievement takes on a different meaning – where our real value comes from our life in Christ.

By engaging with the question: *Who is the God we worship?* an *action plan* becomes the framework in which the people of the Uniting Church live out a theology of disability that recognises all people as being created in the image of God.

- ¹ John Swinton, “Who is the God We Worship? Theologies of Disability; Challenges and New Possibilities”. *International Journal of Practical Theology*, 14 (2011): p 272 – 307.
- ² Kerri Thorne, “Outside the Mainstream”. Published in *Challenging Disabled Practices: Talking about Issues of Disability*, 1997 Dulwich Centre, Adelaide p 27 - 30.
- ³ Walter Wink, *The Powers that Be: A Theology for a New Millennium*. 1998 Galilee Doubleday Sydney. p 167.
- ⁴ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*. 1953 SCM London. p.164.
- ⁵ Burton Cooper, “The Disabled God”. Published in *Theology Today*. 1992 Princeton, NJ.

“Deidre had been in the psychiatric ward for several weeks and I visited her nearly every day. When she asked could I celebrate Holy Communion with her I brought the elements from the local church where I led worship the next Sunday. This was to me a way for her to feel part of a community beyond the hospital setting. I told the congregation something of her story t— of having been sexually abused as a child and as an adult and how in her state of mind she repeatedly cut open her arms or her abdomen in order to “let out the filth that was inside her”. Many people in the congregation wanted to reach out to Deirdre. Some offered to pray for her, one offered to visit and one woman gave me a butterfly badge, a beautiful resurrection symbol to give to her. It wasn’t safe for Deirdre to actually have the badge just then as it would have been another weapon to use against herself. Instead I showed it to her and I wore it for her every day until she was well enough to own it for herself. That became a point to work towards, a goal on the journey of recovery and she demanded to see it each day. Knowing that a whole group of people she had never met were concerned about her was a definite part in her healing. Deirdre moved from the state of saying over and over that she was ‘Satan’s child’ to knowing that she is actually God’s child, and dearly loved”.

- Anon.

What needs to happen? In Easy English

By engaging with the question: Who is the God we worship? an *action plan* becomes the framework in which the people of the Uniting Church live out a theology of disability that recognises all people as being created in the image of God.

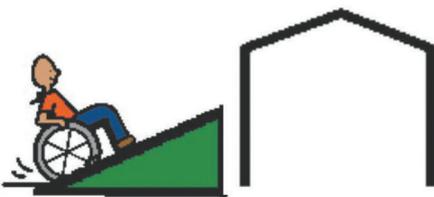
This information is based on conversations the Uniting Church has had with a number of people with a disability.



They said there are 3 ways to include people with a disability in **faith** communities.

The talks also said **what needs to happen** to include people with a disability.

1. You need to get into the place



You



- may use a wheelchair

or



- may use a walking stick

or



- cannot walk far.

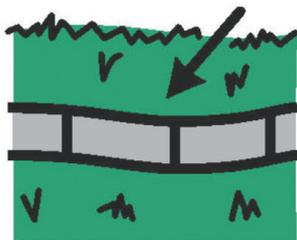


What your church needs to do

Your church needs to make your place easy to get into. For example:

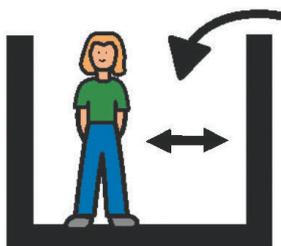


- the car park needs to be close to the buildings

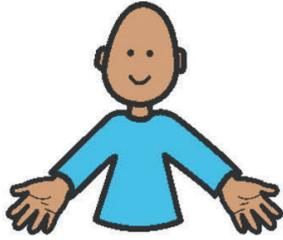


- the paths need to be wide

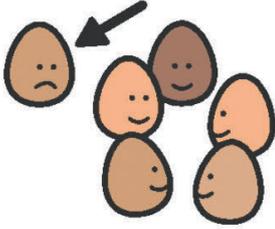
and



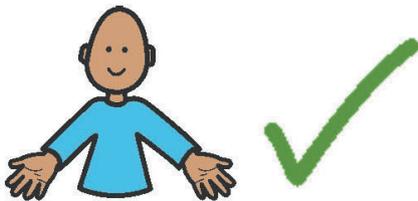
- there needs to be lots of room inside.



2. You need to feel welcome



You may be treated differently because you have a disability.

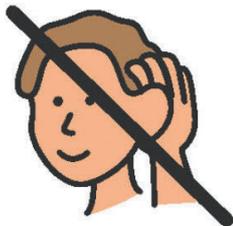


What your church needs to do :



People in your **church** need to

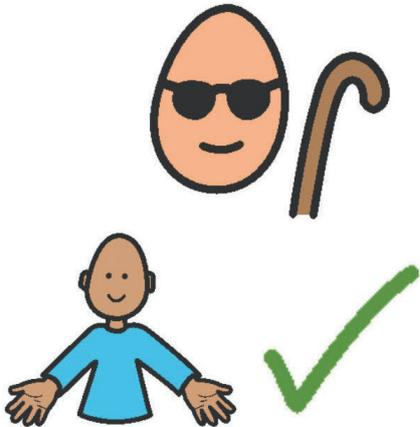
- be friendly
- talk to you like an adult
- value what you say
- **not** feel sorry for you.



You may be

- deaf

or



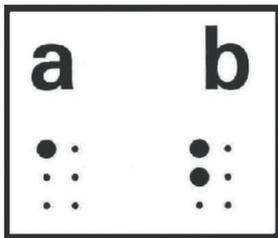
blind.

What your faith community needs to do

Your **faith community** needs to give you information in a way you can understand.

This will help you be part of the **faith** community.

For example, written information in



- Braille

or



- Easy English.

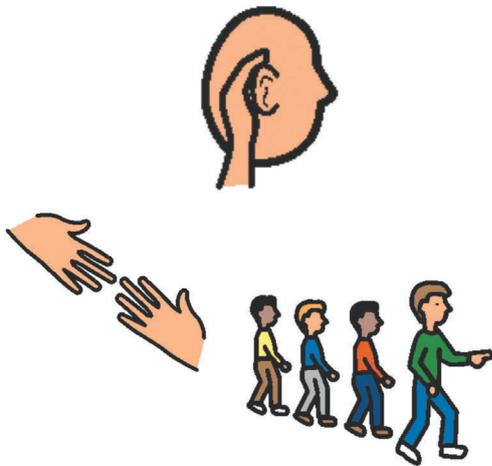
3. You need to have a say about your church community



You may speak up for people with a disability. For example:

- say what people with a disability need
- be in a community that makes decisions.

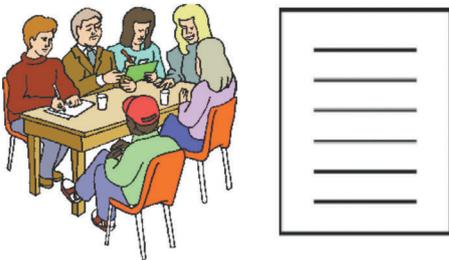
What your faith community needs to do



Listen to you.

Help you be a leader.

What will happen?



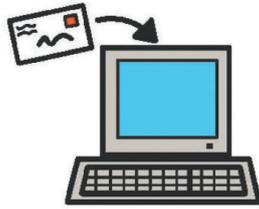
You and your **faith** leaders need to make a plan.



The plan will say how to include you.



More information



Disability Inclusion, Uniting Church Synod of
Victoria and Tasmania

Email andy.calder@victas.uca.org.au

To belong I need to be missed shows people with disabilities and
leaders of faith communities talking about their experiences. Go to:

www.victas.uca.org.au/disability-inclusion



If you are deaf, or have a hearing or speech
impairment, contact us through the National
Relay Service. For more information, visit:

www.relayservice.gov.au

Easy English written for the Uniting Church by the Communication
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Valuing People ClipArt © Inspired Services www.inspireservices.org.uk

Preparing an Action Plan?

An *Action Plan* is what it says it is: a plan for *action*. Today, the term is used by governments, businesses and a range of organisations.

The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) recommends that government, business and service providers prepare their own Action Plans. The aim is to improve equity and access for people with disabilities and reduce complaints under the Human Rights Commission (HRC). Organisations are urged to register their plans with the Commission. Lodging an Action Plan has no legal obligation, but simply indicates the seriousness with which the organisation treats equity and access. The Commission may take the service provider's Action Plan into consideration when determining a complaint, such as assessing whether the adjustments required by the complainant pose an unjustifiable hardship on the organisation.

The development of an Action Plan is purely voluntary, but it does provide a good opportunity to comprehensively and intentionally address the issue of access. What is important is that the very **process of setting up the plan** is in itself educational for the congregation, school or agency.

There are detailed resources about Disability Action Plans and how to develop them on the Victorian Office for Disability website at www.officefordisability.vic.gov.au.

The following is to assist and summarise the process.

Steps in developing a local Action Plan.

Remember, people with disabilities and family members are the experts. You may feel overwhelmed by the following information. That's not the intent: begin the conversation within your setting and make a start somewhere ('small' if needs be) using the following suggestions.

1. Establish a Task/Working Group.

Given the consultative nature of the Uniting Church, it is appropriate that the first step should be the setting up of some kind of working group whose task would be to create, implement and evaluate the Action Plan. In some cases, once the Plan has been established it may only need one or two people to monitor its implementation. Later, the group may be called together to conduct an evaluation of the Plan.

In setting up the group, appropriate representation is essential. Consideration may also need to be given to representing some or all of the following interests and people:

- a) People with disabilities.
- b) Carers, family members or friends of a person with a disability.
- c) People of different ages.
- d) Finance, property and architectural interests.
- e) Educational and communication skills.
- f) Theological and liturgical knowledge/skills.

Such expertise may not always be available from within the organisation, in which case the group would be wise to consult with people outside.

In the case of service delivery agencies, it is important to have a client representative. In the case of schools, including students with disabilities and their parents should be considered.

2. Communication

If the Action Plan is to be effective, it needs to be understood and owned by the whole congregation, agency or school. When creating an Action Plan the end does not justify the means. The way the Plan is formulated and implemented will be crucial for its overall effectiveness. Participation needs to be genuine and comprehensive.

Therefore, the first thing a working group needs to establish is how it will communicate and network within the organisation.

- * How will consultation inside and outside the organisation be achieved?
- * How will the working group communicate its plans and activities (e.g. minutes, displays, news-sheets, announcements, bulletin boards, stories, social media)?
- * How will the working group get feedback from the members of the organisation, including clients, and others (e.g. parents of children, clients of a drop-in centre, families of residents in a nursing home, etc.) as to its progress?
- * How will the working group consult with people with disabilities, taking into consideration the wide variety of disabilities, including those outside the organisation who may be potential members or clients?
- * What provision is there for alternative methods of communication to ensure that people with disabilities have clear access to information and are able to offer feedback?

3. Establishing Policy

In this context, a policy outlines the guiding principles behind the Action Plan. It is an attempt to give a rationale, an ethic, a theology to the Action Plan. Policy formulation includes being informed on issues of equity and access, the nature of disability, and how discrimination takes place, (including physical access and organisational procedures/culture). It may be helpful to learn how other similar congregations, schools or agencies developed their policy. This may be a way of getting started.

Your working group may consider the following approach:

The working group first educates and informs itself of the issues and concerns and draws up a policy statement for circulation and comment within the organisation. The circulation of the draft document may be accompanied by a wider educational program for members.

Such a program could take various forms.

- * Seminars involving people with disabilities sharing their experiences and stories.
- * Forums with speakers/videos and discussion.
- * Special Access Sunday including worship service and discussion opportunities.
- * Tours of buildings led by people with disabilities.
- * Study group examining 'disability' in a theological context.
- * Study of the Uniting Church's Mental Health Resource Kit.

Awareness raising and educational opportunities are important throughout the planning process. This ensures greater participation and ownership. ***The process needs to be an educational and learning experience for as many people as possible.***

4. Assessing the Current Situation

Before any actual plans can be made, there needs to be a review, or audit, of the present situation in the organisation, regarding access and equity. This will require:

- * an access — audit of the buildings and facilities to isolate problem areas,
- * an audit of procedures, programs, services and activities as to their 'accessibility'.

The audit may be helped by using a checklist. The Synod of Victoria and Tasmania has a self-audit checklist.

“What the audit comes down to is clarifying those services, programs, procedures and facilities that make it difficult and sometimes impossible for people with disabilities to take part, remembering that what applies to one person with a disability may not affect another. The spin-off is that access is opened to a much wider group of people generally.”

To optimise credibility the audit should involve people with disabilities, carers, family and friends outlining how they experience obstacles and difficulties. A tour of buildings may be a beginning, followed by issues of access to programs and activities, worship services, materials and information.

5. Working out Solutions

The problems isolated by an audit then need to be addressed. At this stage consultation with resource people outside the organisation may be helpful. For instance, a congregation may consult with another congregation as to how they dealt with various access issues. Schools and agencies may also find value in similar resourcing.

It is essential to encourage feedback and suggestions from people with disabilities. Accurate feedback is also needed from the wider membership of the congregation, clients and workers within agencies, staff and students in schools, as well as any other associated groups.

6. Setting Priorities and Goals

Priorities need to be established. A number of factors come into the setting of priorities, and these may vary from place to place. The following criteria may be useful as a framework in which to decide:

- * Which changes will benefit the most people?
- * Which changes will be the simplest to achieve?
- * Which changes can be made immediately and which ones will take time?
- * Which changes can be afforded at this time?
- * Which changes can be linked to other changes going on within the organisation?

How the priorities are set will depend upon the nature and size of the organisation.

Whatever system of prioritising is decided upon, it needs to be flexible and satisfactory to all members of the organisation. It is important to see how the priorities are inter-connected and how they fit the overall policy.

7. Implementation

The success of an Action Plan depends on sufficient time given to deciding on and documenting how the Plan will be implemented.

- * Who is going to carry out and/or take responsibility for the work being done?
- * By what date is it to be completed?
- * Who will maintain communication with members, clients and people with disabilities?
- * If major building alterations are required, what provision has been made to ensure that services continue safely?
- * Have all the relevant bodies in the organisation been consulted (not merely informed) as to the changes and their effect?
- * What arrangements have been made to review the on-going progress? Will the working group continue to meet and review? Or will this task be given to one or two people to supervise?
- * Who will make the decisions if major changes need to be made in the Plan, because something new has cropped up?

8. Review and Evaluation

Before any action is taken it is important to incorporate review and evaluation procedures. This will mean reviewing not only the completed work, but also determining how the ongoing review will take place.

- Who is going to carry out the review?
- Will it be the original working group?
- Will it be a new group, or an outside expert or audit team?
- How will the review be carried out?

Whoever is chosen to carry out these tasks must represent the interests of people with disabilities, and provide the necessary feedback regarding achievement of the set goals. Consideration needs to be given to whether there will be annual or biannual reviews which could be conducted in conjunction with other organisational reviews?

Some questions and issues to be considered are:

- a) Is there still a need for on-going education?
- b) In what ways can access and equity matters be integrated into the overall conduct and management of the organisation?
- c) How far are access and equity issues part of the internal framework of people's thinking and planning?
- d) Have the needs, uncovered by the access audit, been met?
- e) Have new needs or problems arisen since then?
- f) Have the solutions solved the problems satisfactorily?
- g) What more needs to be done?

***Now you are ready to get on with it.
Don't forget to share your Plans with others.***

“The Arthur Preston Residential Services, run by Wesley Mission Victoria, provides a valued living environment for people living with Huntington’s disease. It was awarded the Royal Australian Institute of Architects, Victorian Chapter Access Award in 1999. The building was designed by KLCK Architects. It has become a model living environment, while at the same time providing safety and dignity for the residents. All the appropriate supports and aids are provided in an unobtrusive manner, while the buildings blend well with the surrounding environment.”

“I was sitting on the bathroom floor with my two-year-old niece watching the front-loading washing machine do its final spins. My niece knew I would take her outside when I had to hang out the washing. All of a sudden I dribbled. My niece went into my kitchen, picked up the serviette, brought it in and wiped my chin. I was reminded of Jesus’ words to ‘enter the Kingdom of God, we must enter it as a child’. My niece loves me, accepts me, and cares for me. If only all people were as accepting of disability”.

Resources

In the past decade or so interest in the field of disability and spirituality, as it relates to practical responses, has increased. The resources listed below are examples of what is available.

General Theological and Sociological Themes

John Swinton, 'The body of Christ has Down's Syndrome: theological reflections on vulnerability, disability, and graceful communities', *Journal of Pastoral Theology* 13 no 2 Fall 2003.

Nancy Eiseland, *The Disabled God: Toward a Liberatory Understanding of Disability*, Abingdon Press, 1994.

Erik W Carter, *Including People with Disabilities in Faith Communities*, Paul H. Brookes Publishing, Maryland, 2007.

Christopher Newell and Andy Calder, eds. *Voices in Disability and Spirituality from the Land Down Under*, New York: Haworth Press, 2004.

Nancy Eiseland and Don E. Saliers, eds. *Human Disability and the Service of God: Reassessing Religious Practice*, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998.

Brett Webb-Mitchell, *Unexpected Guests at the Banquet: Welcoming People with Disability into the Church*, Crossroad, 1994.

Kathleen Black, *A Healing Homiletic: Preaching and Disability*, Abingdon Press, 1996.

Stewart D. Govig, *Strong at the Broken Places: Persons with Disabilities in the Church*, Westminster/John Knox Press Louisville, Kentucky, 1989.

Colin Barnes & Geof Mercer, eds. *Exploring the Divide: Illness and Disability*, The Disability Press, Leeds, UK. 1996.

Tom Reynolds, *Vulnerable Communion: A Theology of Disability and Hospitality*, Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2008.

Information about DDA and development of Action Plans

http://www.humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/content/legal/FDL/2011/5_DDA.pdf
(Australian Human Rights Commission – updated changes to Act 2009).

<http://www.humanrightscommission.vic.gov.au/index.php/discrimination>
(Victorian Equal Opportunity Commission and Human Rights Commission – information about discrimination and complaints process).

www.officefordisability.vic.gov.au
(Office for Disability in Victoria. Information about development of Disability Action Plans)
Synod of Victoria and Tasmania – Uniting Church in Australia. Property Access Audit. Contact Property Services 03 92515200.

Support Agencies

Agencies which support people with disabilities can be useful for advice and information. Some of them also provide access audit services. Though the list is not exhaustive, the following organisations can be contacted as follows.

Occupational Therapy Australia

5/340 Gore St, Fitzroy, 3065

03 9415 2955.

<http://www.otaus.com.au/>

Independence Australia

208 Wellington St., Collingwood, 3066

1300 704 456.

<http://www.independenceaustralia.com/contact-us>

Noah's Ark

1283 Malvern Road, Malvern Vic 3144

(03) 8823 8600

<http://www.noahsarkinc.org.au/>

Vision Australia.

454 Glenferrie Rd, Kooyong, 3144

1300 84 74 66.

<http://www.visionaustralia.org/>

VicDeaf

Level 4, 340 Albert Street, E. Melbourne 3002

(03) 9473 1111, TTY 9473 1199.

<http://www.vicdeaf.com.au/>

Scope

830 Whitehorse Road, Box Hill, 3128

(03) 9843 3000.

<http://www.scopevic.org.au/>

Yooralla

244 Flinders St, Melbourne, 3000

(03) 9666 4500.

<http://www.yooralla.com.au/>

Prahran Mission

211 Chapel St. Prahran 3181

(03) 9692 9500.

<http://www.prahranmission.org.au/>

Overcoming Barriers To Participation Disability Action Plan 2015 - 2018

The overall key objectives are to eliminate discrimination and enhance positive attitudes and participation.

1. UNITINGCARE VICTAS AGENCIES, EARLY YEARS CLUSTER, and UNITING CHURCH SCHOOLS

OBJECTIVES	STRATEGIES	TIMELINE	PERFORMANCE INDICATORS	RESPONSIBILITY
1.1 To ensure clear policy statements which promote universal access, and eliminate discrimination and prohibitive practices. To be developed in consultation with people with disabilities.	1.1.1 To oversee development, where necessary, of access and equity policies in Early Years Cluster, schools and community services agencies.	During course of next 12 months, commencing September 2015.	Organisations produce policies in consultation with people with disabilities/ families and advocates.	Commission for Mission to promote and reinforce the development of such policies.
	1.1.2 Early Years Cluster members to apply the <i>Position Statement</i> in the 'Inclusion of Children with a Disability in Early Childhood Education and Care'.	During course of next 12 months commencing September 2015.	Implementation and communication of objectives contained within <i>Position Statement</i> .	Governance bodies to ensure application, compliance and review.
	1.1.3 Schools to consider developing, if non-existent, an inclusion and access policy.	During course of next 12 months commencing September 2015.	Development and communication of policy. Independent Schools Victoria (ISV) is a resource to assist.	School Councils to ensure implementation and review.
	1.1.4 UnitingCare community services agencies to develop, where necessary, disability access and anti-discrimination policies.	During course of next 12 months commencing September 2015.	Development and communication of policy.	Boards of Governance of agencies to oversee implementation and review.
1.2 Development of Disability Action Plan	1.2.1 Early Years Cluster members, Schools, Agencies to undertake access audits: employment practices, buildings, services provided – to ensure access, both physical and attitudinal.	During course of next 3 years, commencing September 2015.	Achievable goals and plans to be developed and submitted to Human Rights Commission.	Each organisation to develop appropriate Plan with regular review. Commission for Mission to provide relevant information and names of resource people/ organisations to assist.

2. PROPERTY AND ACCESS

OBJECTIVES	STRATEGIES	TIMELINE	PERFORMANCE INDICATORS	RESPONSIBILITY
2.1 To ensure property of UCA is compliant with access requirements.	2.1.1 Property Board of Synod to review April 2006 version of Access Guidelines template according to relevant legislation and specifications.	Complete by December 2015.	Promotion of and notification to all sectors of UCA.	Disability Inclusion to update guidelines and Synod Property Board to review and approve usage.
2.2 Provide funds for minor access upgrades for congregations.	Ensure Disability Access Fund (DAF) is relevant to current needs.	Complete review by December 2015.	Review of DAF and notification to presbyteries.	Synod Property Application Review Team (PART)/ Disability Inclusion.
2.3 All congregations, Early Years Cluster, schools, agencies and Uniting AgeWell to self-audit property.	2.3.1 Use of approved self-audit checklist based on Access Guidelines template.	Complete by December 2015 and commence implementation in 2016.	Production of checklist and promotion of its existence.	Synod Property Board/ Disability Inclusion. OH&S with presbyteries to liaise with congregations and Uniting AgeWell as part of regular audit cycle. UCVT for Early Years Cluster and agencies. Schools to self-audit.
	2.3.2 Congregations & institutions of UCA to prioritise/budget for access requirements for major works. Overlap with OH&S requirements where relevant.	Commencing 2015.	Implementation of renovations and upgrades according to legislation and planning authorities.	Governance bodies of UCA institutions, congregations, presbyteries, Synod Property Board.

“The Arthur Preston Residential Services, run by Wesley Mission Victoria, provides a valued living environment for people living with Huntington’s disease. It was awarded the Royal Australian Institute of Architects, Victorian Chapter Access Award in 1999. The building was designed by KLCK Architects. It has become a model living environment, while at the same time providing safety and dignity for the residents. All the appropriate supports and aids are provided in an unobtrusive manner, while the buildings blend well with the surrounding environment.”

3. CONGREGATIONS/ PRESBYTERIES

OBJECTIVES	STRATEGIES	TIMELINE	PERFORMANCE INDICATORS	RESPONSIBILITY
3.1 To ensure disability issues are at the forefront of presbytery considerations.	3.1.1 That each presbytery be aware of the need to hold meetings in accessible venues.	Ongoing.	Full participation of all people wishing to attend meetings.	Standing Committee of presbytery.
	3.1.2 That presbytery work with congregations and Property Services prior to modification or construction of property. Use of self-audit checklist.	Ongoing.	Increasing numbers of compliant buildings based on missional priorities.	Presbytery and Church Council and Property Services.
3.2 To promote existence of accessible buildings (refer to 2.3.1).	3.2.1 Display access symbol on front notice board, websites and in information about Church activities.	Ongoing.	Increasing numbers of accessible buildings, and people with disabilities utilising them.	Church Council.
3.3 To ensure people with disabilities are able to fully participate in worship, social and leadership roles.	3.3.1 Attitudinal change of <u>belief</u> in <u>all</u> people as gifted, and made in the image of God.	Ongoing.	Increasing presence and involvement of people with disabilities in life of UCA.	All members of UCA.
	3.3.2 Development of theological rationale and statement regarding disability inclusion, with reference to cultural diversity.	December 2015.	Clarity as to gospel imperative of justice and life-affirming relationships.	Disability Inclusion, Intercultural Unit, Synod.
	3.3.3 Promotion of 'Circles of Support' model.	Ongoing.	To enhance friendship and supportive relationships with people with disabilities and their families/carers.	Disability Inclusion, Synod.
	3.3.4 Review of Synod Mental Health Kit for purposes of discussion, Bible studies, liturgy.	June 2016.	Decreased stigma re mental illness, and increased acceptance of individuals and families living with mental illness.	Promotion of information by Disability Inclusion and use by congregations.
	3.3.5 Use of training and resource materials, liturgical resources, large print format, audio loops and personnel able to encourage inclusion and active participation.	Ongoing	Increase numbers of people with disabilities participating positively in the life of the UCA.	Congregations and Disability Inclusion, Synod.

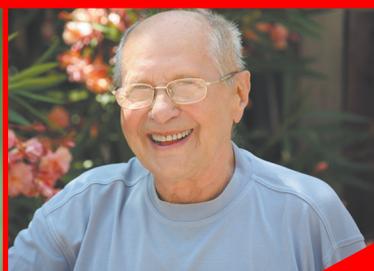
1.4 Development of Disability Action Plans, to promote universal access, and eliminate prohibitive practices. To be developed in consultation with people with disabilities.	3.4.1 All congregations and presbyteries to undertake an audit of buildings, and consider attitudes and practices which exclude people with disabilities.	Ongoing.	Individual and achievable goals and plan developed.	Congregations and presbyteries.
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4. SYNOD

OBJECTIVES	STRATEGIES	TIMELINE	PERFORMANCE INDICATORS	RESPONSIBILITY
4.1 Discern any particular strategies and responses with First Peoples.	Liaise with First Peoples Disability Network (FPDN) and Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC).	Ongoing.	Enhanced supports as needed for Indigenous people with disabilities.	Disability Inclusion and UAICC.
4.2 That the annual worship and meeting of Synod be fully accessible to people with disabilities, reflecting commitment of issue to the wider UCA.	4.2.1 Select a venue which reflects this commitment: toilets, parking, doorway and internal access, as well as access to stage/sanctuary.	18-month cycle.	People with disabilities present and able to freely participate.	Business Committee of Synod.
	4.2.2 To promote worship and meeting of Synod as accessible, by using access symbol.	18-month cycle.	Promoted as such on all publicity materials, and copies of Service available in large print format.	Business Committee.
	4.2.3 To maintain commitment at Synod Opening of signing for people with hearing impairments.	18-month cycle.	Promoted as such on publicity materials.	Business Committee.
4.3 Synod to improve communication with people with disabilities.	4.3.1 To review effectiveness of Relay Service use of Easy English and Communication Access symbols.	December 2015.	Available for use at Synod switchboard, and promoted via Synod communications. Relevant training to be provided.	

	4.3.2 To review effectiveness of web-based systems for people to access Synod information. Regular updates of new resources and information on Synod blogsite.	December 2015.	Positive feedback from people with disabilities re access to information.	Disability Inclusion and IT.
	4.3.3 To collect and develop positive images/stories of people participating in all UCA institutions: a photo repository.	Ongoing.	To enhance quality of interactions and involvement in all UCA life: schools, congregations, agencies.	Disability Inclusion, Commission for Mission and CoMS.
	4.3.4 When publicising events, that images of people with disabilities be included.	Ongoing.	Increased presence of people with disabilities. Stock of images for CoMS to be developed. CoMS staff to have 'disability awareness' session.	CoMS to oversee. Disability Inclusion to advise.
	4.3.5 Development of Communications plan.	By December 2015.	Communications plan to be developed, including multi-lingual formats.	CoMS.
4.4 To ensure the UCA is aware of its employment obligations under the DDA 1992.	4.4.1 To ensure affirmative statement and policy re employment of people with disabilities.	June 2015.	Completion of policy, with more people with disabilities applying for UCA employment. Synod to activate employment via Wesley Employment Services.	HR re Lay Staff Agreements and relevant policy.





Uniting Church in Australia
SYNOD OF VICTORIA AND TASMANIA



Commission for Mission

Find us on www.victas.uca.org.au/disability-inclusion