

**RuralAccess**  
**Building Inclusive Communities**

**September 2002**

## **Community Building in Disability Services – Developing the New Approach**

The issue of community participation and inclusion presents significant challenges for the planning and development of community and specialist support services for people with a disability.

Despite a range of Government policies and a legislative framework which promotes the right to full participation in the community, there are still very limited community membership opportunities available to people with disabilities. National and international research has confirmed this trend, acknowledging that while people with disabilities are living in the community, they are not necessarily regarded as members of their communities.

In this context, the development of a community building approach in Disability Services has emerged from a commitment to creating communities, which recognises the citizenship of people with disabilities, and promotes opportunities for their participation in all aspects of community life.

The development of a community building approach also reflects the Bracks Labor Governments broader vision for strengthening communities. This vision includes:

- Enhancing community cohesion and social inclusion by building on community resources and expertise;
- Respect for the diverse needs and backgrounds of service users and communities;
- Stronger consultative partnerships between State Government, Local Government and community organizations;
- An emphasis on prevention and early intervention;
- Identification of social outcomes and benchmarks, complemented by the evidence necessary to respond appropriately to future service demand and cost pressures.

### **Conceptualising the new approach**

RuralAccess has drawn on a broad range of social theory to inform the development of the new approach including:

- Community Development Theory
- Disability Studies including the social model of disability
- Cultural Studies
- Urban Planning/Urban Studies
- Rural Health
- Community Health/ Health Promotion
- Community/ Citizenship Indicators Research

### **Other Community Building Approaches**

A number of program/planning models have also influenced the development of RuralAccess. These include:

- the Australian Local Government Association's Integrated Local Area Planning (ILAP)
- "Good Practice and Bench Marking in Local Government Community Development and Community Services", developed by the Local Government Community Services Association of Australia
- Western Australia's Local Area Coordination (LAC) Model

- Sport and Recreation Victoria's, Access For All Abilities Program (AAA);
- Aged Care and Mental Health's, Primary Care Partnerships (PCPs);
- Rural Health Gippsland, Partners in Community Building Program;
- "Social Benchmarks and Indicators for Victoria", Consultant's Report for the Department of Premier and Cabinet, Victoria.

### **RuralAccess - Implementing the New Approach**

The new RuralAccess initiative is a key element of Disability Services Division's commitment to community building which complements the general direction of the State Disability Plan and emphasises the importance of strengthening communities so that they are more inclusive of people with a disability. It also provides important links for Disability Services Division to broaden the application of State Government community building policy, in the context of a range of projects associated with the Victorian Government Community Building Initiative and the Growing Victoria Together Strategy.

RuralAccess has been designed to provide a comprehensive response to key issues in the lives of people with disabilities, which integrates formal and informal supports and builds a 'whole of community' approach to planning and service development. This response recognises the need for the development of a broad range of interventions, which promote change at a number of levels to increase community participation and quality of life outcomes for people with disabilities. The approach integrates social and community-building strategies, specialist disability support, coordinated community planning and project development, and individual empowerment strategies to increase responsiveness to both individuals and communities. The new approach, which is based on principles of community development, has moved Disability Services into a position where it can more effectively address issues of systemic and structural disadvantage experienced by people with disabilities.

RuralAccess has enhanced the work of existing community providers and disability services and increased their capacity to work in partnership and collaboration to develop new and innovative systems of support, and opportunities for community participation by people with disabilities.

Each of these services has a responsibility to plan and develop initiatives across the full range of community infrastructure including education and training, transport, health, accommodation and housing, physical access planning, communication and information, and sport, recreation and the arts etc.

Of particular significance is the Integrated Local Area Planning Model (ILAP) developed by the Australian Local Government Association in 1993. ILAP provides a framework for planning and community building in local communities that is characterised by:

- a holistic view of local communities;
- an emphasis on the composite needs of local communities;
- the promotion of partnership between the three spheres of government, the community and the private sector;
- a focus on coordinating activities at the local level;
- an orientation towards establishing long term goals/processes for decision-making and resource allocation rather than one off plans or expenditure programs.

*Making The Connections: A Guide to Integrated Local Area Planning, Australian Local Government Association, July, 1993, refer to Appendix 2, an adaptation of the ILAP Model.*

## **The Story So Far**

The RuralAccess initiative commenced as a demonstration project in September 2000 in the Grampians Region. Four key mainstream community organisations were engaged as auspice organisations for RuralAccess - the City of Ballarat, the Rural City of Horsham, Hepburn Health Services and Grampians Community Health Services.

The initial implementation of RuralAccess in the Grampians Region resulted in change at the local community level, which has seen a range of opportunities developed for people with a disability to participate in the life of their local communities.

The Hon Christine Campbell MP, former Minister for Community Services, announced in April 2001 that funding would be provided for the further roll out of RuralAccess in Barwon, Gippsland, Hume and Loddon-Mallee Regions.

There are now twenty-seven full-time RuralAccess workers in key mainstream community organisations, including Local Government Authorities and Community Health Services.

Each of the RuralAccess services plays a pivotal role in local communities by developing a framework for planning which integrates the perspectives of a range of community stakeholders. This integrated approach to community planning will help to identify needs, priorities and opportunities which will inform the development of a range of projects and initiatives in local communities that respond to key issues identified by people with a disability and their families.

## **How does RuralAccess work?**

RuralAccess assists the community to include people with a disability and their families by:

- Helping people and organisations to work together more effectively;
- Improving community understanding about the needs and aspirations of people with a disability through community education and awareness raising;
- Developing and implementing projects which respond to needs and community priorities;
- Ensuring that the needs of people with a disability are the focus of community planning;
- Supporting service providers to assist people with a disability to live the sort of life they choose;
- Developing easy ways for people to access the information they need about services, community activities and issues.

## **What has been achieved??**

Since full implementation of RuralAccess in December 2001, a number of exciting initiatives have emerged including:

- Development of an extensive range of projects across the full range of community infrastructure;
- Involvement in a broad range of existing community planning networks and forums and the development of new planning forums to enable communities to respond more effectively to the needs of people with disabilities;

- Identification of key issues and priorities in communities through extensive community mapping;
- Engagement of people with disabilities in planning and civic participation activities;
- A range of community education and awareness strategies which promote positive attitudes to people with disabilities.

## Community Mapping

Each RuralAccess service is required to conduct community mapping to identify key issues and priorities in communities and to inform project development and planning. Initial community mapping has identified a range of issues including:

- Service Fragmentation
- Poor links between specialist disability support services and community services
- Limited recreation and social opportunities including accessible and inclusive tourist opportunities
- Limited education and employment opportunities
- Shortage of respite support/holiday programs
- Limited availability of long term and emergency accommodation/housing options
- Limited availability of Advocacy services
- Resources/funding to meet needs of people living in remote areas
- Generally low levels of disability awareness across a range of community services
- Lack of accessible and affordable public transport – limited transport options to regional centres
- Poor physical access to public buildings/space
- Information products not available in accessible formats
- Prohibitive costs of services
- Limited understanding and use of adaptive equipment and specialist supports eg TTY facilities
- Limited access to legal services, financial counselling and financial support services
- Limited coordination of waiting lists for specialist support and other more general forms of support (eg. Home and Community Care) for people with a disability.

## Project Development

Whilst for the most part, the last twelve months has seen the new workers settling in and establishing themselves within the auspice organisation and the local community, a number of projects are already starting to emerge. The projects span a broad range of community infrastructure and are examples of partnership and collaborative approaches which link people with a disability, disability services providers and mainstream community organisations. The projects also respond to issues identified through initial community mapping strategies.

Some specific examples include:

- **Economic Development** - Good Access is Good Business – Gippsland Region; Communication Protocols Guide for local businesses City of Ballarat;
- **Tourism** – Redevelopment of the Port of Echuca Authority (Campaspe Shire) and the Rutherglen Wine District (Upper Hume RuralAccess);
- **Education and Training** – Hepburn Local Educational Services Project, Hepburn Health Service; Computer Connections Project – (a joint initiative between Daylesford

Neighbourhood House and Daylesford Community Health Centre targeting socially isolated people with disabilities and aged citizens), Hepburn Health Service;

- **Communication and Information** – Accessible Communication in Alternative Formats, Latrobe City; Warrnambool RuralAccess - Winner of the Pierre Gorman Award presented by the State Library of Victoria. (In partnership with the Corangamite Regional Library Corporation (Camperdown), RuralAccess will work with library staff to identify ways to improve library services for people across the region. The project will showcase the latest technology, information storage and access, learning resources and adaptive technology);
- **Sport, Recreation, Arts and Culture** – Making the Difference Day (Come and Try Day in partnership with local sport, recreation and arts and cultural providers attended by over 150 people) Mitchell Community Health Services; Sports For All Program, a partnership between City Of Warrnambool, Warrnambool Netball and Volleyball Associations, and South West Access Agency. (This program recently won the South West Sports Star Award in the category of disability development);
- **Health and Primary Care** – Medical Student Training - a partnership between Monash University, RuralAccess and Regional Victoria Rural Disability Associations spanning all 5 regions; HACC Waiting List Working Party, Rural City of Mildura;
- **Civic Participation** – Community Centre/Neighbourhood House Committee of Management Training, City of Greater Geelong, Queenscliffe;
- Access to the Built Environment – Port Campbell Urban Design Framework, Corangamite Shire;
- **Community Safety** – Working with South West Community Safety Committee to ensure disability issues are incorporated into community safety planning across Local Government Authorities of Glenelg, Southern Grampians, Warrnambool, Moyne and Corangamite.

A full list of current projects within each region has been developed.

### **Local and Regional Planning**

It is critical that Disability Services develop area based planning frameworks as a means of mobilising a range of key community stakeholders to build community and organisational capacity to support people with a disability.

RuralAccess is expected to have a lead role in establishing new planning processes in local communities and sub-regional areas. A commitment to community or area based planning will help to identify key community issues and priorities and will potentially engage the full range of community services in responding more effectively to the needs of people with a disability.

RuralAccess workers have been actively involved in leading the development and convening of new planning forums where the need and interest has been identified.

Below is a list of some of the planning forums RuralAccess workers are currently involved in:

- Primary Care Partnerships and other Health Networks
- Safer Cities and Shires
- Neighbourhood House Networks
- Road Safety Forums
- Supported Residential Service Planning Networks

- Disability Service Planning Networks
- Regional DHS Disability Advisory Groups (Hume and Barwon)
- Respite Networks
- Family and Children's Services Networks
- HACC Advisory Groups
- Youth Services Networks
- International Day for People with a Disability Planning Committees
- Victorian Local Government Disability Officers Network
- Sport and Recreation Networks
- Regional Arts Council

**Further information about RuralAccess can be obtained from:  
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