



VARUNA THE NATIONAL WRITERS' HOUSE DISABILITY INCLUSION ACTION PLAN 2021-2024

Key values:

Respect and inclusivity

Strategic objective:

Reflecting diversity

“Varuna will reflect the talent of all Australian writers, making our residencies and services accessible to all.” Varuna, the National Writers' House Strategic Plan 2021-2024

1. INTRODUCTION

2020 has brought a significant change to Varuna, that is the building of a wheelchair-accessible studio. This new building opens up opportunities for writers who have previously been unable to stay in residence at Varuna.

This building project has been a catalyst to consider a holistic approach within our organisation to better accommodate writers and audiences with disability in everything that we do.

Along with this physical infrastructure, Varuna is committed to invest in staff training and systems to ensure inclusivity for all our programs. We also aspire to develop a specialist disability fellowship program in partnership with a key arts and disability organisation to begin to nurture meaningful exchange within the literary and disability sectors.

This Disability Inclusion Action Plan (DIAP) is Varuna's first and represents important progression of our strategic objective to reflect diversity.

2. OUR VALUES

Varuna's DIAP aims to set out goals and actions that will remove the barriers that have previously prevented people with disability connecting with Varuna residency programs. Our DIAP will pave a way for Varuna to better support writers with disability to develop their skills and writing careers. We also want to ensure our public programs and events are easily accessible to all.

The plan's foundation rests on the knowledge of the importance of self-told stories, and our key values of respect and inclusivity. We plan to create opportunities for writers living with disability, so Varuna can more accurately reflect the diversity of Australian writing.

Varuna adopts the 2006 UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities definition of persons with disabilities to include those 'who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others'. We support the social model of disability in which environmental or attitudinal barriers created by society are the cause of disability, separate to an individual's condition.

This plan is to support anyone who experiences barriers as a result of their particular condition (such as the lack of physical access, communication barriers, discrimination or other people's attitudes). This includes, but isn't limited to, people with sensory or physical conditions, hidden conditions, ongoing medical conditions, people with cognitive or learning disability or mental health conditions.

3. OUR ORGANISATION

Varuna is the only artist residency in Australia that is devoted exclusively to literature, and one of only a handful in the world. This focus has enabled the

extraordinary creative output of many of Australia's best writers. Each year, numerous literary prizes and accolades confirm the calibre of Varuna's alumni.

Varuna is now an essential part of Australia's literary community. The spirit of generosity that sparked the creation of Varuna by Mick Dark (son of writer Eleanor Dark) almost 30 years ago, along with his belief in the importance of writing and writers, continues to inspire the very best of Australian writing. Varuna's strategic mission is to support artistic excellence, diversity, community and sustainability and to continue to be part of an international network of globally significant artist residences, delivering literature that is distinctively Australian to a worldwide readership.

4. THE DIAP PROCESS

The DIAP development process has been guided by the following legislation and government policies:

- Disability Discrimination Act 1992
- National Arts and Disability Strategy
- United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)
- NSW Disability Inclusion Act 2014
- NSW Disability Inclusion and Access Planning Guidelines

As part of the process Varuna has created a Disability Inclusion Advisory Group who have been key to the development of the DIAP and will continue to help shape our actions going forward. Advisory Group Chair and Varuna Board member Zoe Harrington has been joined by Sarah-Jane Staszak, Ursula King and Kerri Shying as members of the group. We thank them for their support.

Varuna has also enlisted Accessible Arts, NSW's peak arts and disability organisation, to review this DIAP and our associated policy. The review has been led by Liz Martin, one of NSW's leading specialists in disability-related access and inclusion for the arts and cultural sector.

5. VISION

To make an active commitment to writers and audiences with disability, locally and nationally, that fosters respect, promotes understanding and encourages engagement with Varuna's programs and events.

6. PLAN

Varuna's DIAP will focus on four pillars to access: Attitudes and Behaviours, Liveable

Communities, Employment, and Systems and Processes.

Attitudes and Behaviours

Goal: Varuna will increase its organisational capacity for inclusiveness attitudes and behaviors through consultation, training and programs. Varuna is committed to training staff and volunteers in appropriate disability protocols and increasing disability awareness amongst all organizational stakeholders.

Attitudes and Behaviours	Action	Timeline
1	Establish a Disability Inclusion Advisory Group comprised of a board member and three writers with disability	By 31 August 2020
2	Information available to residents regarding understanding the needs of writers with disability i.e. Disability, Awareness and Equity Resources	By 1 January 2021
3	All permanent staff, and where possible board members, and volunteers to undertake Disability Confidence training	By 31 December 2021
4	Develop a Fellowship program in partnership with a key arts and disability organisation	Launch pilot program during 2021
5	All permanent staff to attend Mental Health First Aid Training	By December 2021
6	Provide key staff, board and where possible volunteers with Disability Inclusion Training to be inclusive of people with blindness and low vision (eg. through Guide Dogs NSW)	December 2022
7	All staff and volunteers are made aware of this DIAP and Disability Inclusion Protocols and FAQs during initial induction and orientation.	Ongoing

Liveable Communities

Goal: Varuna's programs and events are accessible for writers and audiences with disability.

Liveable Communities	Action	Timeline
1	Complete the wheelchair accessible studio	August 2020
2	Ensure website includes detailed site information for potential residents	31 November 2020
3	Ensure WIFI access in new studio	31 November 2020
4	Assess how Varuna can interface with NDIS support and facilitate residents to support their stay with NDIS funds.	December 2020; ongoing
5	Complete the 'Accessibility Starter checklist' to determine inadequacies e.g. Braille signage on microwave and washing machine , visual prompts in kitchen and pantry and develop a timeline for upgrades	31 March 2021
6	Explore feasibility of providing a Hearing Loop at Varuna and Auslan interpreter/ Hearing Loop at key events	June 2021
7	Research technology available for writers who are unable to physically write. Explore the idea of providing a technology specific mentorship and the possibility of accessing funding to purchase specific technology for use at Varuna.	By December 2021
8	Investigate accessibility of our international residency exchanges	By December 2021
9	New community /office building plans are designed to be fully accessible.	January 2023
10	Continue to ensure all new built infrastructure to be designed to be fully accessible.	Ongoing
11	All information regarding programs, events and workshops include accessibility information including international access symbols.	Ongoing
12	Ensure all ticketed events collect accessibility requirements upon booking.	Ongoing
13	Ensure marketing strategies actively promote programs and events to people with disability, both as audience members and as writers,	Ongoing

	including on our social media channels.	
14	Include image description and Alt text on social media posts	Ongoing

Employment

Goal: Varuna will investigate opportunities to increase its commitment to workplace equality and inclusion.

Employment	Action	Timeline
1	Prioritise contractors who support employment of people with disability.	Ongoing
2	Ask all staff and volunteers for information on access requirements as part of the induction process and in annual reviews.	Ongoing
3	Engage a writer with disability for the position of Varuna Consultant	30 June 2022
4	Actively seek out a writer with disability for a position on the board when one is vacant	December 2022
5	Explore funding options for an accessible office space as part of the new community building	January 2023

Systems and Processes

Goal : Varuna will review and improve systems to ensure better access to services, venues and support.

Objective	Action	Timeline
1	Develop a Varuna Accessibility FAQs document.	By 31 November 2020
2	Ensure relevant Varuna documents are available in accessible formats	31 January 2021
3	Review current Varuna Resident Handbook and the 'meet and greet' procedure in regards to: - first aid and emergency procedures to	31 January 2021

	<p>ensure the requirements of people with disability are addressed</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ensure local mental health support services are mentioned -procedures for notifying staff of any WHS issues -ensure Varuna values are highlighted as well as the need for everyone to feel safe and supported during their stay. 	
4	Collect data on writers with disability that apply for all Fellowships, and who are successful.	From January 2021 ongoing
5	Review current website to see how we comply with WCAG 2.0 standards	By December 2021
6	Develop partnerships with arts and disability organisations to promote our programs including local disability and mental health support organisations .	Ongoing
7	Collect feedback regarding accessibility to programs and events.	Ongoing

7. MONITORING & EVALUATION

Varuna will monitor the fulfilment of goals and actions as outlined in the Disability Inclusion Action Plan (DIAP) with the Varuna Disability Inclusion Advisory Group three times a year and will report updates and revisions to the Board annually.

Varuna will also report achievements, challenges and learnings to stakeholders where appropriate.