



Yarra Ranges **Council**

Equity, Access and Inclusion Strategy 2013–2023

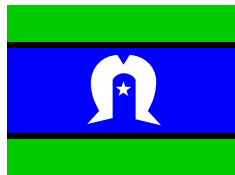
Final Report

Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners

Yarra Ranges Council acknowledges the Wurundjeri and other Kulin Nations as the Traditional Owners and Custodians of these lands and waterways.

We pay our respects to all Elders, past, present, and emerging, who have been, and always will be, integral to the story of our region.

We proudly share custodianship to care for Country together.



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Introduction

People with disability (and unpaid carers) have a human right to be included in all aspects of community life. This also brings many social, cultural, and economic benefits for the wider community.

Almost 20% of Yarra Ranges residents have a disability. Over 5% need daily support with core activities. This is because of age, chronic illness, or profound disability. Almost 15% of residents provide unpaid care to a person due to disability, health condition, or age.

The Yarra Ranges Equity, Access, and Inclusion Strategy (Disability Action Plan) 2013–2023 outlines some ways Council will work to improve disability access and to advance equity and inclusion for people with a disability. Council is developing the next iteration of this Strategy.

This report shares some of the highlights, achievements and reflections of Council throughout the Strategy's lifecycle. Council has completed many projects that contribute to access, equity and inclusion across the Yarra Ranges, it should be noted that this report does not feature all of them.



Image description: Current Yarra Ranges Disability Advisory Committee members and Cr Len Cox smiling at the camera. One man and one woman seated in wheelchairs at the front. Seven women and two men stand behind them.

Development of the Strategy

A cross-Council working group at Council meet every three months called the Access and Equity Reference Group.

This group of staff provided advice about what should be written in the Strategy. Members of the Yarra Ranges Disability Advisory Committee (DAC) also contributed. The DAC are key stakeholders. They guide implementation of the Strategy and bring lived experience to decision making.

Vision

Yarra Ranges is an accessible, inclusive, and equitable society that enables people with a disability to fulfil their potential as equal citizens.

Goals

The Strategy sets out four goals to help achieve the vision.

- Goal 1:** Information and communication from Council is accessible to everyone in our community and supports equitable participation and inclusion in civic life.
- Goal 2:** Council buildings and infrastructure are accessible to everyone in our community.
- Goal 3:** Yarra Ranges is an inclusive community where all citizens can participate equally.
- Goal 4:** Council's commitment to equity, access and inclusion is demonstrated in all aspects of the business.

“You need to promote what Council has achieved and where we are heading. People don’t realise the good work that’s been done, and that Council are trying to improve lives”. – DAC member

★ Highlights and Achievements for Goal 1

Goal 1: Information and communication from Council is accessible to everyone in our community and supports equitable participation and inclusion in civic life.

Accessible website

Council have an accessibility menu on the website. It allows individuals to choose features that suit their needs. Users can also pick an accessibility profile such as 'blind,' or 'dyslexia.' Once selected, the website's content transforms into an easy-to-read format. It's made for that person's preferences.

Accessible information

There are many sporting groups, reserves, and pools. There are also water play parks and clubs. They offer accessible recreation options for community members. Information about them is on Council's website. The website also includes information about the location of accessible toilets. And Changing Places facilities. And guidance on how to access them.

Accessible communications

'Our Brand' is an internal document. It helps staff create documents in a consistent way, including accessible colour contrast and font size.



Image description: Accessibility page from Yarra Ranges 'Our Brand', guidelines document. Image shows coloured dots with black and/or white stars to indicate accessible colour contrast for each colour.

Lilydale Service Centre

The upgrade of Lilydale Service Centre includes an accessible counter. It has armed chairs and communication tools. It also has well-trained and supported staff.

Accessible documents

Key Council documents are available in accessible formats on Council's website.

Diverse representation

Council documents include images of diverse individuals with disabilities. It promotes understanding and acceptance.



Image description: Page from the Council Plan document with three images of a diverse range of community members participating in community engagement.

Reflections on Goal 1

Council have guidance to help staff create accessible documents. Yet, staff do not fully understand or follow it. The next plan will focus on improving staff skills and capabilities to create accessible documents. This may involve training and creating accessible PowerPoint templates. Every public document should be available in an accessible format as standard practice.

Council will take a staged approach. Council will include information on the website about the accessible features of all Council's public buildings. Council could do the same for play spaces. And list the location of accessible car parks. Council might include the accessible features of local businesses. This could encourage them to improve accessibility. Council could look for outside funding or partners. They would help to create social stories for the website. This would support individuals who are neurodiverse. Council could put all the information on an accessibility map. The map would be for the Local Government Area.

★ Highlights and Achievements for Goal 2

Goal 2: Council buildings and infrastructure are accessible to everyone in our community.

Lilydale Depot all-inclusive amenities

The redevelopment resulted in the first gender-neutral and all-inclusive amenities layout in a Yarra Ranges Council building.

Changing Places

Facilities installed at four locations. Lilydale Lake, Monbulk Aquatic Centre, Yarra Centre, and McKensie Reserve. Another one is being built at Kilsyth Stadium. The stadium also serves as an Emergency Relief Centre.

The facilities have a shower, accessible toilet, an adult hoist system, Braille signage, colour contrast and tactile indicators.



Image description: View into Changing Places facility from open doorway, showing adult sized change table.

Narre Warren East Pavilion Upgrades

Involved renovating the upstairs change room and including an accessible toilet. Council made a conscious decision to go beyond the minimum requirements by including a new external accessible ramp. This provides access from the downstairs social space to the newly renovated amenities.

Millgrove Community Sporting Pavilion

The design and construction includes accessible parking, and compliant paths. There is an accessible toilet with a shower and baby change station. The community rooms include ambulant toilets, Braille signage, colour contrast, and tactile indicators.



Image description: A new external ramp alongside construction fencing at Narre Warren East Pavilion.

Accessibility improvements at Kilsyth stadium

Council plays an important role in meeting the essential needs of individuals and communities after emergencies. The Yarra Ranges Municipal Recovery Plan included a review of accessibility of emergency relief centres. This review assessed floors, toilets, and signs. The DAC consulted and visited the sites. Following this, upgrades to Kilsyth Stadium are in progress. They include building a Changing Places toilet facility.

Planning for footpaths

Has identified and mapped around 700 links, with 65% responding to community requests and 35% added for overall network improvement. These links, spanning across each Council ward, are prioritised based on proximity to public transport, schools, shops, and key facilities to maximise community benefits.

Lilydale to Warburton Rail Trail Signage

Council made five new signs. Council worked with Wurundjeri women Brooke Wandin and Mandy Nicholson to create them. They are solar powered. They include words and pictures. They also have a button. When users push the button, they can listen to stories, songs, and language in Woiwurrung.



Image description: Community member standing to the right of signage on Warburton Rail Trail.

Mooroolbark Community Centre upgrades

Include a ramped entry and exit, accessible theatre seating, toilet, wheelchair access to the stage, and wide pathway and pram crossing from the car park. Handrails were repainted in a contrasting colour based on advice from the DAC and Vision Australia.

Play Space Projects

Every new play space includes at least one piece of age- and ability-friendly equipment. Features include: Accessible paths and water fountains; Soft-fall flooring and wheelchair-accessible equipment; accessible ramps and picnic tables.



Image description: Belgrave Lake playground with soft-fall flooring and inclusive play elements.

Monbulk Pavilion upgrade

including ramps for accessibility. Since the project's completion, there has been an increase in attendance and participation of people with disability.

2019 Inclusive Sport, Recreation, or Open Space Infrastructure award for the Lilydale to Warburton Trail

The project was inspired by resident and DAC member James. He had challenges navigating the trail. He was on his recumbent bicycle. James collaborated with Council. They redesigned chicanes for better accessibility. This helps to ensure rider safety at road crossings. This makes the trail more accessible for people with disability and creates a better fit for prams, hand cycles, tandem bikes, and other non-standard vehicles.

More collaboration followed. Council evaluated Adaptive Mountain Bike tracks near Lilydale Lake and also looked at the Wesburn and Warburton Mountains. Council checked if they are compatible with a recumbent bicycle and evaluated parking and toilet accessibility.



Image description: Man in a red jacket and blue jeans seated on a recumbent bicycle. Council officer is in high-visible jacket watching man manoeuvre around witches' hats on a section of the Warburton trail.

Monbulk Urban Design Framework

The DAC provided collective advice. A DAC member did a site visit. Over 2,300 pieces of community feedback also informed the Framework. Council adopted it in 2023 and made more than 20 changes based on community input. They include combining pedestrian crossings, improving intersections, adding car parks, and pathways to toilets. The Framework guides Council's decisions and priorities for Monbulk.

Accessible Parklets

COVID-19 presented many challenges. Council wanted to support safe outdoor gatherings. Parklets were installed throughout the Shire. This was to encourage outdoor dining and community interaction. They had accessible features. This included space for wheelchair movement, ramps, varied seat heights, and shade. Advice from a DAC member and Vision Australia helped with features for those with visual impairment.



Image description: Three women talking at Upwey parklet. One is standing, two are seated. Entrance to accessible ramp on the left of image.

Belgrave Hub

The new facility opened in April 2018. The Hub provides health and other community services for the Hills area and is managed by Inspiro Health. It also has a community playground. The Hub has an easy-to-reach counter and an elevator. The Hub is also home to the Dandenong Ranges Emergency Relief Service and the Orange Door. Council's Maternal and Child Health and Aged and Disability services are here too.

Reflections on Goal 2

All Council renovations and new buildings follow the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) Requirements. But, with over 750 buildings and little external funding, there is still work to do. Council want to keep improving. Council want all public buildings to be accessible and this Strategy ensures Council continually strive towards achieving this. An audit of Council buildings and continued site visits with DAC members will help to understand the accessibility requirements on an on-going basis. Council will aim to maximise benefit of each building and renovation to community. Clear benchmarks, measures and reporting will ensure transparency.

★ Highlights and Achievements for Goal 3

Goal 3: Yarra Ranges is an inclusive community where all citizens can participate equally.

Grants for Community

Program supports local groups and artists. They use it to implement self-designed projects. These projects improve mental and physical health. They also foster social connection, culture and community celebration.

Councils Grants Program includes an assessment of at least 15% proposals to include diversity and inclusion. Grant applicants can ask for advice on shaping events to be inclusive and accessible.

Some programs funded through the Grants for Community Program include:

Community Keys: Draws from Luke Jerram's 'Play Me, I'm Yours' Street Piano artwork. It aims to bring music to the Yarra Ranges streets. Eddie and Mandy at ABC Piano Removals donated the pianos. Six will be placed in public locations from February to April 2024. Community members are invited to play and enjoy the pianos. They are all accessible via ramps or at street level. They have safety features to protect young children.



Image description: A group of four women seated, smiling at camera, each with a musical instrument in hand.



Image description: Flyer for Community Keys launch event. Black and white piano keys are positioned at the top. Text in orange is positioned from the mid-way point downwards.

Cinema with Open Captions

Sessions are held many times each week. They are held in Healesville and Warburton. Council also provides free cinema tickets to some community support groups. They give the tickets out to the community.

“The recipients [of the complimentary cinema tickets] were delighted to receive them! Several families that would not have had the opportunity otherwise to enjoy such a treat! One Grandparent who is a carer for her grandchildren and several single people received two tickets so they could take a friend with them.”

– Healesville Inter-church Community Care Inc. (HICCI) staff member.

Crops for Community

Will be delivered by Yarra Valley ECOSS. The program gives volunteers the chance to be active. It is for people of all abilities. They also learn about healthy eating and growing organic food from seed to harvest. Participants take produce home. They donate it to two local food relief agencies: Oonah Indigenous Tuckerbag Program and Koha Community Cafe. It is also sold at ECOSS Valley Market.

The Parents Hub

Will create and deliver an evidence based “Building Positive Connections” program. They will do this in partnership with local business, Play Move Improve. The program will help small groups of parents and their children (under 5 years of age) with additional needs. The groups may or may not get NDIS support.

International Day of People with Disability

Is commemorated with an event led by Council. It has run each year, for the past nine years.. It celebrates the contributions and achievements of local people with disability. This year the event had live Auslan interpreters. The presenters always have lived experience. Food is provided by localsocial enterprises. The 2023 event had keynote speakers. They were Dr. Melinda Smith OAM and Sarah Hopkins from Your Library. They discussed how using assistive technology can transform lives.



Image description: Six people facing camera and smiling at event. Two standing either side of two seated.

Community Transport and Advocacy

Council advocates to the Department of Transport for a bus network review. Council want more buses at night and on weekends. Council want tele-bus services, and on-demand bus services. Until June 2022, Council helped some individual older residents. This included help with shopping, with outings and medical appointments. The Information and Navigation Service refers community members to other services they can use.

Bridges Connecting Communities is supported by volunteers. It offers safe community transport for Southwest Yarra Ranges residents.

EV Community Transport provides 1:1 or group transport services. They support people over 65 through My Aged Care and those under 65 through Home And Community Care (HACC) funding. They ran a pilot program in the Upper Yarra region from August 2023 to January 2024. It was supported by the Department of Transport. It connected community members with transport, to those who needed it.



Image description: Woman (left) in light blue shirt and black pants, assisting a man (left) in brown trousers, grey cardigan, and brown hat into a white van.

Mobility Scooter Safety Program

Was conducted in 2022. It was a partnership with Council and Japara Neighbourhood House, Department of Transport, Travellers Aid, and Victoria Police. The program let participants try various mobility devices. It included members from the Mullum Mullum Indigenous Elders Group. They tried the devices and participated in a skills and safety course.

Supporting community to Connect

Council gives \$400,000 to 11 Neighbourhood Houses. It does this each year. The goal is to address loneliness by promoting social connection and a sense of belonging. Lilydale Community House is inclusive of all abilities. It recently hosted a successful weekend line dancing event with over 80 participants.

Anti-magination: Sharing Stories of Autistic Writers in the Yarra Ranges

Provides an opportunity for children and adults with autism to come together. They can share their passion for creative writing. Authors will see their work in print. They will help to promote positive views of autism.

The Fish that Wanted to Fly

Created a welcoming and inclusive environment for children with disabilities and their families. The show did a Yarra Ranges Small Halls tour.

My friend Felicity took her 6-year-old autistic son, and his younger sibling, to see The Fish That Wanted to Fly in Mt Evelyn. She said she hardly ever goes to things like this fearing they'll be too overwhelming and then unwelcoming, and was so happy to find it so inclusive, welcoming, and fun – and they all had a wonderful time. And she loved that it was local!"

– Audience member



Image description: Woman (left) dressed in green with a toy crab on her hand, smiles next to two young girls (right) who are smiling, facing forwards.

Voices from the Edge

Is led by Tecoma Uniting Church (TUC). It works with local people and organisations who represent those living with disability, First Nations people, LGBTIQIA+ people, and at-risk young people. The project will plan and run up to three Mini Festivals. They will be titled "Voices from the Edge." The goal is to celebrate difference. It is to offer inclusion and start conversations.

What Lies Beneath

Is an inclusive initiative. It is led by artist Fleur Dean. It is at Steve Curry's three-story venue in Healesville. The cast is diverse. It includes Indigenous people, LGBTIQIA+ people, at risk youth, elders, and people with disabilities. The content comes from 12 weeks of workshops. The workshops explore lesser-known local lore and history. The project playfully challenges personal boundaries. It offers enlightening views on survival at home. It prioritises accessibility. Top-floor performances are prerecorded and shown on the ground floor. This gives wheelchair users a simultaneous experience. There is Auslan interpretation on one evening.

Disability Inclusion Newsletter

Informs the community about available supports and activities throughout the Yarra Ranges. It promotes accessible events and programs and features stories of local individuals. It celebrates their achievements and resilience. It's for people with disabilities and their unpaid carers in the Yarra Ranges. Also, for anyone with a shared interest in disability inclusion.

Intergenerational connections

Events have been held since April 2022. The Healthy and Active Ageing Team has led them. They work with Family and Children's Services. The goal is to bridge the generation gap. It brings together seniors and younger community members. There are events for grandparents and grandchildren. They are during each school holiday. The events have activities like Bingo, Treasure Hunts, Lego, and Board Games. 145 people have taken part. The gatherings have strengthened ties and also made lasting memories for all ages.

Pathways for Carers

This program started in 2015. It supports carers of people with a disability or mental illness. Participants walk and talk with other carers. They learn more about local services and supports. The program offers social connection. It also provides reliable information and physical activity. It operates in Mt Evelyn and Healesville. Council thanks its partners. They are: Mt Evelyn Community House, Healesville Living and Learning Centre, and Villa Maria Carer Supports.

“Pathways for Carers has helped carers to feel welcome. It is inclusive, inspiring, mood lifting, compassionate, understanding, authentic, full of fun and laughter. Carers can come as they are and feel seen and valued”.

– Shek, participant of program.



Image description: Eight women in a bush setting, smiling at camera.

Inclusive Programs at Leisure Centres

Belgravia Leisure operates the centres. Council owns them. The centres provide recreation for everyone. A sample of examples includes:

- A comfortable and safe gym program for older people.
- Accessible gym equipment for people in wheelchairs.
- Goldie's aquatic arthritis support group. It's an exercise program. It aims to reduce joint pain and boost mobility.
- Grooving is a chair-based exercise program. It is set to music. It is suitable for those with mobility limitations.
- Carer's Feel-Good Friday: Carers get in free at leisure centres. It's on Fridays. It recognises their key role. They are important in the community.
- Swimming lessons for individuals and community organisations supported by NDIS.
- The Take Charge program offers a free 60-day membership. You need a referral from a health practitioner to join. You can negotiate the ongoing fees. They are for continued participation.
- The RecLink program is supported by Vic Health. It provides gym and swim access to 16-25-year-olds. They get access through a referral process. The referrals come from allied health practitioners and RecLink/Belgravia Leisure. Participants, including those with disabilities, can use the pool and gym for free. They may then join group exercise sessions.



Image description: Flyer for Feel Good Fridays for Carers program. Three cartoon people smiling, coupled with text detailing the program.

Interchange Outer-East

Volunteers work with Council and are committed to sustainability and minimising herbicide use. Council identified play spaces as a priority. Volunteers hand weed and collect litter in 130 play spaces. They do this every month. It helps Council reach its sustainability goals. A grant from the Department of Environment, Land, Water, and Planning supports volunteers. The volunteers have disabilities. It expands their participation in nature projects.

Rec Link Australia

work in partnership with Council. They deliver programs that meet the needs of the communities within Yarra Ranges. Accessible community sport, recreation, and arts opportunities activities are offered. They are free of charge or at an affordable rate.

First Impressions Clothing Exchange

(FICE) launched in mid-2019. It is run by Cire Services. FICE is supported by grant initiatives from Council's Economic Development team. The initiatives are based on partnerships. FICE supports long-term unemployed women. This includes those with disabilities. The women get retail training in a real store. FICE also has workshops on job search and interview skills. They cover mental resilience, self-confidence, budgeting, and presenting oneself well. FICE is open Monday to Friday at Lilydale and Yarra Junction. It also has a pop-up shop at Chirnside Park Community Hub.

Consulting with the DAC

Led to changes in the consultation for Council's Economic Development Strategy 2022 – 2032. This was to ensure an accessible Word version of the document and a captioned video for use in consultation were created.

The Rainbow Tree

Was presented at The Memo Healesville in April 2023. It was part of Council's school holiday program. The Rainbow Tree is lively and a playful work of musical theatre for families. The performance, including songs was live interpreted in Auslan. Kirri Dangerfield was the Auslan interpreter. The Rainbow Tree makes all shows as relaxed as possible. There was a breakout area. It had fidget toys, noise cancelling headphones, and toys to cuddle and squish.

Promoting Accessible Tourism

Council organised forums in Monbulk and Yarra Glen. Council worked with Yarra Ranges Tourism and Tourism Victoria. The goal was to educate the tourism industry. They were taught about the benefits of entering the accessible tourism market.

A third Forum was facilitated with Yarra Ranges Tourism at The Memo in Healesville. It explored the benefits of accessible tourism for business growth. The event featured insights from DAC member James. It also had presentations from Parks Victoria on the All-Terrain Wheelchair and Sherpa volunteer program. And a display by Knoxbrooke showed its employment of over 90 people with disabilities.



Image description: Woman with dark clothing and red scarf talking to seated audience members. All-terrain wheelchair is displayed at front of room in front of a red stage curtain.

Dementia friendly Yarra Ranges

Caladenia Dementia Care and Council launched the Dementia Friendly Yarra Ranges Project. The project is supported by a Council Partnership Grant. The initiative is a collaboration. It aims to make the Shire more inclusive and accessible to people with dementia, caregivers, and the community.

Over the next four years, the project will focus on educating front-facing staff and volunteers. This will enhance their awareness and skills to help people with dementia. The project actively involves service providers, community members, and those with dementia. It aims to improve information and service access. This will foster a dementia-friendly environment in the Yarra Ranges.



Image description: Flyer for Dementia Action Week. Four pictures of community members near a coffee van, and text in centre of images.

Margins to Mainstream

Council supports training for people with disabilities. It took part in initiatives like Systemic Advocacy Training (2015). And Enabling Women with Disabilities and Enabling Young Women with Disabilities Leadership programs (2018). Council worked in partnership with neighbouring Councils, Women's Health East (WHE), and the Outer Eastern Local Learning & Employment Network.

Since 2020, Council was in the Project Advisory Committee for the Margins to the Mainstream (M2M): Preventing violence against women with disabilities project. M2M puts the expertise of women with disabilities at the centre of prevention efforts. It is an initiative of the regional partnership, Together for Equality and Respect.

The Project Advisory Committee shaped and supported the M2M project's development and delivery. Council recruited women with disabilities for the Experts Group. They shared project training information with staff. They shared co-designed resources from M2M. They also connected with the Outer East Community Inclusion Alliance (OECIA) Network.

In 2022, Council's 16 Days of Activism event featured speakers from the M2M Experts Group. They highlighted the Council's commitment to raising awareness and addressing violence against women with disabilities.

“The M2M workshop was incredibly rewarding. The more people I meet and learn about, I think it helps put things into perspective. And be more accepting. A lot of disabilities are invisible. There is no such thing as normal”.

– Marie, participant.

Poetic portraits

The exhibition and publication were launched at the Lilydale Civic Centre on September 28, 2023. It marked the start of the Yarra Ranges Over 50's Festival. The project was a collaboration between Council and RMIT University. It brought together people aged 50 and older. They were from diverse backgrounds in the Yarra Ranges. It included people with disabilities and chronic illnesses. It also included other community members. They shared rich life stories through poems. The poems were about relationships, ageing, and connection to self and landscape. Photographer Cathy Ronalds took portraits of the participants to go with the poems.

The application process prioritised accessibility, considering factors like colour contrast and text size to enhance readability, poems were placed at the bottom of images. They address concerns about height. The printed anthology is for sale at the Yarra Ranges Regional Museum.



Image description: Man in white shirt and black trousers holding a walking stick, standing in front of artwork at the launch of Poetic Portraits.

NDIS forums delivered

To address the NDIS rollout challenges, Council held 13 workshops. They also had training programs with community partners. These initiatives aimed to equip the community with necessary knowledge and support. The goal was to help them navigate the complexities of the changing disability landscape. Council thank partners, including Yooralla, Healesville Connections, Amaze, Carers Victoria, National Disability Insurance Agency, Victorian Mental Illness Awareness Council, Neami, Each, Wellways, Villa Maria Catholic Homes, Tandem Anglicare, and Maroondah Council, for their support.

“[My son] has serious disabilities and is supported by the NDIS... For [my son] it is the only social time of his week, the only time he is with people, the only time that he gets “out of himself “ and becomes involved in something creative.”

– Father of long-term pottery student at Mooroolbark Community Centre.

Family, Children and Youth Services (FCY)

Design specific programs with a clear focus. They foster inclusion and support for all community members. Some key initiatives include:

- Preschool Field Officers (PSFO's) aim to help early childhood educators. They will enhance their skills, knowledge, and confidence. This will help them create inclusive kindergarten programs for all children.
- There are programs for small groups during school holidays. They include activities like Soccer and Bookaburra. The programs aim to help children and families with social anxiety. They do this by providing more personal interactions.
- Grand Hunt / Gumboot Walk: FCY picks accessible venues. They use outdoor spaces to ensure comfort for neurodiverse children and their families.
- Evidence-based "small-talk" programs. They are for parents and children with diverse needs. The programs are run by experienced facilitators. Council makes sure the program is inclusive and accessible. They make changes as needed. For example, they support people in wheelchairs, neurodiverse children and vision-impaired babies.
- Inclusivity Logos are displayed on flyers.
- The FCY newsletter is designed to be accessible. It has text options for images, left-aligned text, and accessible use of colour and font. It also provides a hard copy option.



Image description: From left to right - Aboriginal flag, Torres Strait Islander flag, Progress Pride flag, International Symbol of Access.

Community Change Makers Program

The 2023 course had 21 participants. It included people with a disability and other community members. They participated in 10 in-person/online sessions. They explored different topics. Examples include community engagement and development, cultural awareness, diversity, and inclusion. They also covered the role of local government. They covered advocacy, positive group dynamics, and public speaking.

The graduates set out to inspire positive change from what they learnt. Their projects include a BMX/skatepark in Montrose and safe pedestrian crossings in the Upper Yarra. They include volunteer projects. And environmental education and advocacy in the Dandenong Ranges.

The Art and Sole Project

Was a collaboration between Council, Inspiro, and community stakeholders. It aimed to encourage walking in Lilydale. The project celebrates Wurundjeri art. It includes signed walks and maps. The project aimed to improve community knowledge and access to walking routes. This includes routes to Lilydale Station and the nearby shops.

Three community members conducted an accessibility audit during an onsite visit. One was a DAC member with lived experience of disability. The audit of Lilydale Station revealed some positive aspects. Including lifts, ramps, and auditory messages.

The audit also found many safety risks and accessibility issues. One concerns a curved concrete footpath near the pedestrian crossover at Main Street. It hinders wheelchair access to the pedestrian cross-over button that leads to the station entrance. Council resolved this issue by removing the curved feature. This made the station safer and more accessible for the community.



Image description: A curved footpath met by tan bark next to a road crossing button. A person in a wheelchair with a dog are on the right of the curve.

Reflections on Goal 3

Many projects and programs have supported access, equity, and inclusion for people with disability. They have also supported unpaid carers. Council will keep seeking outside funding and partnerships and will also offer grants for community-led initiatives. These initiatives should enhance social connection and wellbeing. Council will keep advocating and educating about the benefits of accessible tourism. It will also help the community see and use its current assets and strengths.

★ Highlights and Achievements for Goal 4

Goal 4: Council's commitment to equity, access and inclusion is demonstrated in all aspects of the business.

Council's Access and Equity Reference Group

Is a group of Council staff who meet every couple of months. They oversee the implementation of the Equity, Access, and Inclusion Strategy. They make sure that Council are collaborating, ensuring the advice and input of Councils DAC and reflecting and continually improving on accessibility.

Disability Inclusion Officer

Council used to employ a Metro Access Officer. It was funded through the Department of Health and Human Services' Building Inclusive Communities program. The role helped advance Council's goal of creating a fair, accessible, and inclusive community. But funding ended due to NDIS changes in 2019. So, Council committed to adding a full-time Disability Inclusion Officer role.

This role remains crucial. It drives community engagement and important work with community. It continues to act as a conduit between community and Council. It facilitates the Disability Advisory Committee and the Access and Equity Reference Group. It also builds the Council's capacity in all areas.

Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System

Council submitted to the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System. It focused on groups at a high risk of mental illness. These groups include young people, men, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities, and carers.

Council's advocated for localised responses and also for outreach support, and place-based approaches for early intervention. The submission acknowledged a \$4.5 million Federal investment for a new Integrated Youth Health Hub in Lilydale. The hub is expected to address mental health challenges for young people. It will do so with a coordinated and comprehensive approach.

Hidden voices

Was a project led by Eastern Community Legal Centre (ECLC). It was funded through the State Government's Suburban Revitalisation Program. A DAC member took on the role of project officer.

The project was held at Lilydale Library and Yarra Ranges Regional Museum. It featured participants, including individuals with a disability. They shared personal stories. The goal was to challenge stereotypes and prejudices through dialogue.

Shek, a carer for her son on the Autism spectrum, participated in the sessions. Her son was born in Australia. But, Shek, a migrant, faced challenges navigating the NDIS.

“I went through a very stressful journey. My intention in joining these Hidden Voices sessions is to build awareness for carers in the community and also advocate for people with a disability. It also gives me the confidence and acknowledge that I’m on the right track.”

– Shek, Hidden Voice project officer and participant.

Lilydale Major Activity Structure Plan

During the development of the Lilydale Major Activity Structure Plan, a focus group took part. It included individuals with disabilities, advocates, and support services. They engaged in extensive community consultation. Their insights informed the Structure Plan. It now includes key directions. They enhance disability inclusion, equity, and accessibility. This includes making public spaces easy to access as people use them for community interaction, learning and socialising.



Image description: Lilydale Major Activity Structure Plan document cover: Features a retail precinct with plants in front, accompanied by sheer waves of colour spanning the entire image.

Carers Employment Support Program

SwinLocal and Community House worked with Swinburne University. They worked with 21 Learn Locals and the Department of Families, Fairness, and Housing. Together, they secured funding for a Carers Employment Support Program.

A DAC member was involved in the Project Reference Group. They were also the Link Worker. The program connected 108 carers with jobs in 2022. The initiative aimed to support and empower carers. It achieved great success. This success led to a one-year extension of funding.

Accessible path for Lilydale Lake boat shed

Council secured funding to expand the Lilydale Lake boat shed. It was to create an accessible path for the Sailability program. The Lilydale Sailing Club runs the program. It is for disability services and their clients. On specific sailing days, the club welcomes the general public.

The club is not-for-profit. It was established in 1990. It is dedicated to offering an inclusive sailing experience. The Sailability program has also produced accomplished sailors. It has achieved success at the Paralympic and international levels. It originated from a broader vision of disability groups.



Image description: Red brick structure (boat shed), with open roller door.

Disability Awareness Training

Council provides Disability Awareness Training for all employees. It helps them work better with individuals with disabilities.

Other training initiatives that have been delivered include:

- Autism Awareness training for Early Childhood Services staff.
- Inclusive language and accessible communication tools training for Service Centre staff.
- Youth Mental Health First Aid. It equips staff to support young people with mental health problems or crises.

“I attended the Scope training... and found it extremely valuable. It broadened the way I think of people with disabilities and made me more aware of the issues they may face. The training helped me understand how I could remove these barriers with design thinking and with more respectful and empathic communications. It would be great if it could be part of the induction, if not for all staff, then at least for staff in customer-facing roles.”

– Yarra Ranges staff member

Inclusive emergency planning

DAC members shared their experience with the COVID-19 pandemic. They also shared about the severe storm on 9 June 2021. They did so via Council's Pandemic and Storm Impact Survey. Council used the survey results to shape Storm Event Recovery Programs. They also used them to track the programs' success. They ensure that people in the community with additional needs are included. They are included in all emergency planning, crisis management, and recovery.

There is an approach called Person-Centred Emergency Preparedness (P-CEP). Michelle Villeneuve from the University of Sydney developed it. Council explained P-CEP in workshops for people with disabilities and their unpaid carers. They partnered with Red Cross, Victoria Police, and Country Fire Authority (CFA).

The Red Cross and CFA offered one-on-one discussions. The goal was to find gaps in individual's emergency planning. This would support participants to better plan for emergency preparedness and response. The Civic Centre also hosted a forum. It was for Yarra Ranges Disability Inclusive Emergency Planning. DAC members participated and were invited to register for P-CEP Facilitator Training.

Job Access Partnership

In early 2023, Council partnered with Job Access. The goal was to improve disability inclusion in employment. Funded by the Department of Social Services, Job Access reviewed Council's hiring. It gave positive feedback on website accessibility and job ad clarity. Feedback suggestions were incorporated. For example, Council made the application process simpler. Council also increased font size and were clear about reasonable adjustments.

The partnership will investigate more areas. These include building disability confidence, reviewing workplace policies, raising internal awareness and finding ways to increase disability employment across Council.

Housing Strategy

In 2022, Council drafted a Housing Discussion Paper. It was available for public feedback. The paper covered many housing topics. These include making housing more diverse and supporting more social and affordable housing. It received strong support from community, Council's Housing Reference Group, and the DAC. Insights from public feedback informed the 2023 Yarra Ranges Council Housing Strategy. It delved deeper into discussions on housing diversity and affordability. It outlined specific actions for the next 15 years.

Reflections on Goal 4

Building staff capacity is crucial. It means that disability access, equity, and inclusion are considered in all Council business. The Access and Equity Reference Group continues to drive these ideas and encourage cross-Council collaboration across departments. Council will keep working with Job Access and aim to hire more people with a disabilities.

Image description: The back view of two adults (left and right) hold the hand of a child (middle), walking on a path in a bush setting.



Conclusion

The Yarra Ranges Access, Equity, and Inclusion Strategy 2013-2023 has made great progress towards the vision of a Yarra Ranges that is an accessible, inclusive, and equitable society. That enables people with a disability to fulfil their potential as equal citizens. Council acknowledges that there will always be further work to do to ensure this vision.

The next version of this Strategy is being developed. It will build upon the success of the outgoing strategy. It will be strengthened by the including the voice of community. To learn more about the Strategy and to follow our progress visit our Shaping Yarra Ranges website: <https://shaping.yarraranges.vic.gov.au/access-equity-and-inclusion-strategy>

Council appreciates the collaborative efforts of both internal and external partners. They continue to advocate for emerging issues and these partnerships continue to drive projects and initiatives in the community. They promote fair, inclusive, and accessible participation, connection, and wellbeing.

Council extend a special acknowledgement to the members of the Disability Advisory Committee. Their pivotal role significantly contributed to the success of the Strategy. They shared their lived experiences and advice generously. This ensured Council's work is informed and responsive to the community's needs. Council sincerely thank them for their invaluable contributions.

Contact Information

Community Links

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Healesville
110 River Street

Monbulk
21 Main Road

Yarra Junction
2442-2444 Warburton Highway

Upwey
40 Main Street

National Relay Service

133 677 – for callers who have a hearing, speech or communication impairment and for Text Telephone or modem callers

1300 555 727 – for callers using Speech to Speech relay

9658 9461 – Teletypewriter (TTY)

Translating and Interpreting Service

131 450 – Translating and Interpreting Services (TIS) National. An interpreting service is available if required.

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