

CASE STUDY: Arts For All

Auckland Art Gallery and access awareness training

August 2013

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki provided access awareness training for staff and presented sign language interpreted talks to visitors with the support of a grant through Arts For All, a Creative New Zealand and Arts Access Aotearoa partnership programme.

Meg Nicoll, Community Learning Co-ordinator, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki talks to Arts Access Aotearoa about its access awareness training for staff; overcoming the challenges she encountered along the way; and the impact of the project.

1. Background: about Auckland Art Gallery

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki is a public art gallery, established in 1888. It holds New Zealand's largest visual arts collection and makes these accessible to all its visitors. The past year has been an exciting time for everyone working at the gallery, which re-opened in 2011 with completely new spaces and facilities for exhibitions and programmes.

Access is built into our mission statement. We're always looking for ways to improve our access, and provide meaningful programming that enables connections between art and people.

During the redevelopment, we had access guidelines in place to guide the design of the building. Now, developing an access policy for the whole organisation is high on the agenda.

2. The project: what it is, why you did it and what you wanted to achieve

The learning programmes team, which includes 15 staff and lots of great volunteers, works very collaboratively to develop and deliver programmes for schools, families and adults. As part of the redevelopment, the team was expanded to include a new group of gallery educators delivering across a range of our programmes.

As the Co-ordinator of Community Learning, I took on the job of driving the access training. It was a big job because of the consultation and co-ordination required, and having to fit in around our busy schedules. However, it's really important to us that our programmes are accessible to everyone. That's why we wanted to have some training that gave the team a chance to develop a shared understanding of access and what it really meant.



Arts For All is an Arts Access Aotearoa/Creative New Zealand partnership programme. The aim of this programme is to encourage arts organisations, venues and producers to improve their access to disabled audiences. Download *Arts For All*, published in 2014 by Arts Access Aotearoa, at artsaccess.org.nz or call 04 802 4349 for a hard copy.



We hoped that access training could be the start of an ongoing conversation within our learning programmes team and with the rest of the organisation so the gallery could continue to improve its access for everyone wanting to visit and enjoy the riches on offer.

3. The process: developing and implementing the project

The first thing we did was consult with Be. Accessible, an organisation that assessed our access soon after the building was re-opened. As an organisation, Be. Accessible is familiar with the gallery and its learning programmes. After an initial conversation, we were all keen to work together to develop a tailored, two-part training session for our team.

The key elements to project implementation:

- We had a conversation with Megan Barclay (Be. Accessible) and Julianne McEldowney (Disability Resource Centre) to establish our aims and share expertise.
- Megan and Julianne visited us to watch some of our learning programmes in action and to get a sense of our day-to-day work. They gave everyone an access awareness survey to complete so they could get a feel for our areas of interest and current level of understanding.
- Be. Accessible delivered an initial training session based on responses to the access awareness surveys and their visit to the venue.
- Our team spent some time thinking about our practice and we looked at readings on access before the second training session.
- We used what we had learned from our own experiences and the readings to workshop current programmes in the second session.
- Together, we developed an access philosophy for our team. We made recommendations about how to continue the conversation within the wider organisation: for example, organising access training for other teams in the gallery, starting with our volunteers and front-of-house staff.

4. What were the main challenges and how did you overcome them?

- **Getting everyone in the same room**

With a busy team all working on different schedules, it was difficult finding time to sit down and have these conversations. "Creative" scheduling (e.g. finding gaps in the schedule and asking people to come in outside of their normal working hours) helped overcome this challenge. We also tried to communicate clearly with plenty of notice so that people could come prepared.

- **Staying informed but not getting bogged down in information**

As a team, we were all very keen to have as much information as possible about how we could improve access for our participants. But we also wanted everyone to feel confident about making decisions and thinking creatively about programme delivery and development. We didn't want anyone to feel as if there's one "right answer" out there waiting to be found. We met this challenge by focussing on how to apply what we had learned to our programme development and delivery. We found that just one idea to make a programme more accessible for one person invariably made it more accessible for lots of people. We started thinking about access in a more expansive way. Looking for practical ways to make programmes more accessible allowed the team to share ideas and it definitely built our team's confidence to be able to develop and deliver accessible programmes.

6. What were the key elements that made the project a success?

The training was great because it gave the team a shared language and approach to access. But even more than that, now we have an increased confidence to ask questions and come up with our own solutions so we can our make programmes more accessible. Key elements to the project's success included:

- consulting closely with Megan and Julianne of Be. Accessible throughout the process of planning the training
- meeting between the training sessions to respond to feedback and make adjustments in the delivery of the second session
- working together as a team within the training sessions to generate ideas and share stories.

7. If you did it again, would you do anything different?

- Next time, we definitely want to include the programme participants (e.g. schools, families, community groups) in our planning process so they can give their feedback and ideas about their experience of our accessibility.

8. How did you evaluate the project? What did the evaluation show?

Be. Accessible provided awareness surveys at the start of the project for our team and then evaluation forms after the first training session. We also had an open conversation at the end of the second training session with the team. People said they went from a place of "wanting more information" to "feeling more confident and comfortable" taking steps to make programme delivery and development more accessible.

Meg's five tips for arts organisations and venues to maximise the benefits of access awareness training for staff

- Take time to share everyone's expertise.
- Take time to share ideas as a team without the pressure of creating an end product
- Plan to keep the momentum going. Plan follow-ups, share what you learn with a wider team and find ways to make conversations about access part of your planning.
- Communicate your training aims clearly with partners and participants.
- Do some homework outside of the training time.

For more information:

Meg Nicoll
Community Learning Co-ordinator
Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki
T: 09 357 1930
E: meg.nicoll@aucklandcouncil.govt.nz
W: www.aucklandartgallery.govt.nz