

City of Melbourne and Deaf Blind Victoria

'We support our community members – whatever their age, sex, physical ability, socio-economic status, sexuality or cultural background – to feel like they can be active, healthy and valued. We plan and design for our growing city, including safe, healthy and high-quality public spaces.'

City of Melbourne, Places for People, Research Report, 2015

'International Day of People with a Disability is an important opportunity to share with the community, government and service providers the 'good' and 'bad' and remind everyone that the goal is equal access for all – for me, equal access to communication technology will give me a sense of independence and the confidence that I can truly participate in everything.'

The two quotes above remind us that self advocacy groups share common interests with many local community and government organisations.

In this case, *Deaf Blind Victoria* (DBV) and the *City of Melbourne* have a mutual interest – the promotion of inclusion for all members of the community to services and life in the Central Business District and Melbourne's inner urban communities.

For over 30 years the Victorian deafblind community has been working tirelessly and lobbying for support to ensure real community and social inclusion. This has included developing individual and group self-advocacy strategies focussed on the rights of people who are deafblind.

In 2007 some concerned members of the deafblind community felt it was vital to setup a deafblind self advocacy group for Victorians so their voices could be heard:

'We felt people who are deafblind are too often unseen and unheard; we were a community without a voice.' *DeafBlind Victoria*

It was with this in mind that DBV with the support of the Self Advocacy Resource Unit (SARU) established a partnership with the City of Melbourne in 2014.



Case Study **3**

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“...at first we were a bit tentative and I am sure SARU was in there watching and monitoring and wondering how is this going to go but after 2 years of working together we were fine”. Peter Whelan, MetroAccess Project Coordinator, City of Melbourne

Peter is the *MetroAccess Officer* at council and has a role and responsibility to work with people with disabilities on community capacity building initiatives across all areas of community services and social infrastructure.

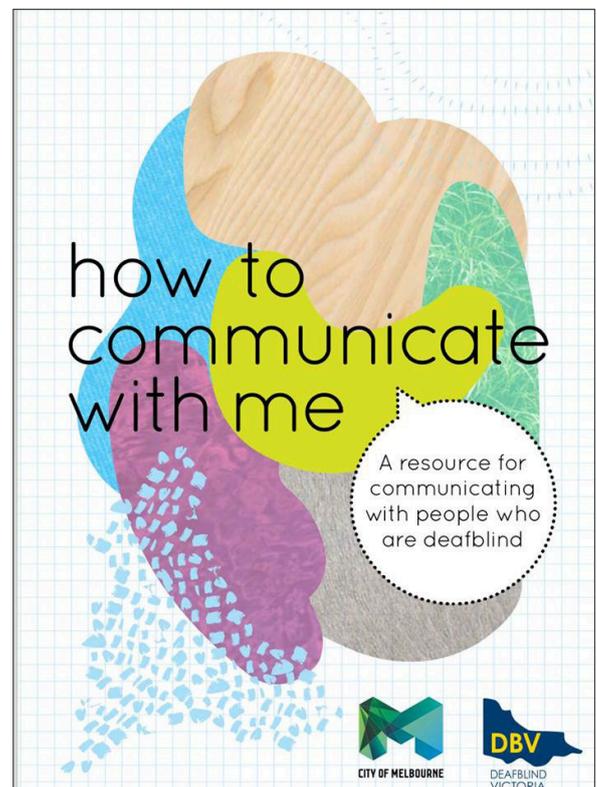
He is one of 55 *MetroAccess* and *RuralAccess* workers across the state funded by DHHS and based in local government to drive inclusive community planning and development.

Peter’s role makes it easy for DBV to locate a worker who can support their activities and link them to key elements of council’s inclusive planning strategies.

‘Peter has a passion for community. He is always looking for opportunities to engage. I look at the City of Melbourne as being really pro-active through Peter’s MetroAccess role. The council has been so supportive. It’s a great example of local government and self advocacy working together’. Sue Smith, Self Advocacy Resource Unit



A core element of the partnership has seen council provide DBV with grants to run Deaf Blind World training and develop communication booklets promoting awareness of deafblind issues. This training has been run regularly with council staff.



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'We did the Deaf World training twice a year – everyone talks about it. It's a reference point for other councils – with the City of Melbourne taking the lead there is potential for other councils to follow and take up the training. This also encourages groups like Public Transport Victoria and Yarra Trams to get on board. What has also been great about the work with DBV is that when we partner on something everyone at Ross House hears about it. Ross House is so important for Melbourne – It brings a lot of groups and people into the city who would not normally come into the CBD and its fantastic that groups like DBV are based there.' Peter Whelan, MetroAccess Project Coordinator, City of Melbourne



Ross House, Flinders Lane Melbourne CBD

The partnership has also led to relationships with key council staff and councillors and access to meetings in key civic spaces like the Town Hall where council has partnered with DBV on a number of *International Day for People with Disabilities* events.



The contact with council staff includes meetings with the Lord Mayor who is now very familiar with the group's work.

DBV members are also represented on the *City of Melbourne Disability Advisory Committee*.



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Another important element of the partnership is the involvement of DBV members in consultations both internally and with other developments across the city.

There are major developments happening in Melbourne all of the time. It is a large and very busy council.

DBV has been engaged in consultations in relation to the *Kings Domain Master Plan*, the *Queen Victoria Market Renewal*, the council submission to the *Metro Rail Project*, *Future Melbourne 2026*, and the *Inclusive Melbourne Project*.



The partnership with the *City of Melbourne* is a source of great pride for DBV, Council and the SARU.



The training provided by DBV to council staff has enabled a number of important access and inclusion issues to be identified for a group of people that have felt very isolated from community life.

That council is determined to act and respond to these issues inspires confidence from DBV members that something is being done to effect change and to ensure that their right to participate in the life of the community of Melbourne is respected and valued.

It is a powerful example to other councils across the state of what can be done to include if you are prepared to **resource, plan and negotiate** in good faith and centre people with disabilities in community planning conversations.



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