

# Access News

## AAA



Access Audits Australia

disability access  advice  training

## Living A Life..... Aquatic Adventures

Summer in Australia usually includes a fair share of sun and water. Going for a swim whether in a pool, river or at the beach is all part of the holiday experience, but for many getting to the water can be the biggest challenge of all.



One of my earliest memories of being in water was swimming laps of the pool where we were staying during our annual family summer holiday. Suddenly a man, fully clothed jumped in, grabbed me and dragged me out of the pool. He thought I was drowning, when in fact I was, with my own unique swimming style, only trying to break my sister's lap record.

Ever since that day my challenge has been to find accessible aquatic experiences either in or close to the water. Many people with disabilities find being in the water relaxing, liberating and a relief from constant pain caused by long-term medical conditions. The challenge is often to independently get in and out of the water.

A beach can be very inviting except for the sand, if you have a wheelchair or are unsteady on your feet. A wheelchair designed for beach type conditions can provide a person with a means of having an enjoyable and memorable summer experience.

Local and state governments are increasingly aware of the need to provide access to beaches and recreational fishing areas. The economic and tourism benefits to local communities should not be underestimated. The Gold Coast and the Sunshine Coast areas in Queensland are examples of where providing accessible facilities definitely increases business (as my credit card proved during a recent family holiday).

A visit to a local public swimming pool or aquatic centre can be fun, or a nightmare, depending on how you are required to enter or exit the water. A swimming pool with ramped entry can provide independence and freedom whilst the use of a hoist to transfer someone into the water may be nerve racking and/or embarrassing for the person concerned and probably for the staff member asked to assist as well.

Meanwhile, I look forward to getting in the water over summer, enjoying the sun and surf while swimming (not drowning) and.....*Living a Life.*

If you would like each Access News emailed to you contact us at [AAAaxs@bigpond.net.au](mailto:AAAaxs@bigpond.net.au)

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### Access Audits Australia

provides the following range of services to support improved access to the built environment and to the provision of goods and services:

- ◆ Disability access training
- ◆ Community consultation
- ◆ Access presentations, publications and inspirations
- ◆ Development and Review of Disability Action Plans, Development Access Plans, policies and procedures
- ◆ Access Audits, Evaluations and Design Advice

Access Audits Australia is pleased to advise or assist you with any access issue.

Contact 

### Access News

is published by

### Access Audits Australia

92 Old Eltham Road, Lower Plenty

Victoria, Australia. 3093

T. 03 9431 3472 F. 03 9431 3046

[AAAaxs@bigpond.net.au](mailto:AAAaxs@bigpond.net.au)

[www.accessauditsaustralia.com.au](http://www.accessauditsaustralia.com.au)

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## Pool Access

The majority of stand-alone recreation facilities throughout Australia are either part or fully owned by local governments. Increasingly some of these may be managed by non-government organisations.



The question of access for all, including older persons, parents with children and people with disabilities, wasn't necessarily a significant consideration when many of the older style centres were developed. Often hoists, sling units or a chair style lift may have been installed originally or later retrofitted, but these are now not a recommended option, unless in a rehabilitation pool, due to considerations of equality, dignity and independence, as required under the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA).

Times have changed and any organisation that does not incorporate accessible aquatic features for all users is reducing the potential attraction and usability of a facility, as well as exposing their organisation to a possible discrimination action in respect of equitable access to premises under the DDA.

Individual requirements can vary as to how a person may prefer to access a pool area. Some people can effectively use appropriate steps with handrails, whereas others perhaps with balance problems may become anxious if confronted with steps as the only access option. Some people may find ramps too slippery or difficult to use, whereas others who may only be able to enter via a ramp, appreciate the gradual change of water level and may feel at risk or exposed if forced to use a hoist, sling or chair lift. Maintenance, operating knowledge and replacement costs can also be issues with such equipment.

Many new or remodeled centres do incorporate zero entry depth, beach or ramp entries into toddlers, rehabilitation or larger pools. Features such as accessible family change rooms, larger adult size change tables, dedicated water accessible wheel chairs and handrails within pool areas provide additional support for some patrons. Access to spa and sauna areas is often overlooked as being just too difficult, yet most barriers have been introduced through the design and construction stages. Narrow entries and stairs into and out of these areas can also limit access.

Lower cost elements to improve accessibility can include effective information and direction signage, appropriate colour contrasting to define horizontal and vertical surfaces or doorways to assist people with vision impairment, appropriate height and types of fittings, non slip surfaces especially on pool decks and staff who are trained to understand and respond to individual needs. Whatever the access response it is critical that independent, dignified and equitable access is the targeted outcome.



## Beach Access



As access to every beach in Australia is probably only a dream for people with disabilities who love the ocean, it is important to identify areas where access can be provided that also incorporates other accessible facilities. It is also equally important that these areas are well signed and promoted.

Accessible beach areas should include accessible parking, pathways or boardwalks, shade and shelter, accessible toilet and change facilities as well as installations such as drinking fountains and accessible viewing areas. When selecting beaches for access improvements, it is useful to identify areas where there is relatively low level ground or foreshore access that can be traversed by a wheelchair.

## One Person's View

She describes herself as being a chronic show off as a little girl, a bit of a rebel at school, somewhat of a drama queen as a teenager but definitely not a sports person.

She studied drama at university and having found out that she could encourage and teach others, decided to study special education. Her life experiences have included working as an actor, teacher, stage manager, choreographer and director.

One day Anna Healey woke up to find she was blind in one eye. Specialists advised that they could not find any medical explanation. Over time her vision returned, first in black and white, then eventually in full colour.

While Anna kept working as an integration teacher, small things started to happen to her, particularly regarding her balance. Following further medical opinions she was hospitalised for more tests, where in 1991 at 28 years of age, she found out that she had Multiple Sclerosis. Initially, all she received was negative, awful responses in hospital that MS was devastating, that it would destroy her body and undermine her self worth. No one spoke about a positive approach to her disease or how it could be empowering for her.

In attempting to adjust to this shock, Anna and her long time partner, Paul, decided to get married, so she organised the

whole wedding while spending 3 stays in hospital during the 6 weeks period between the diagnosis and the happy event. Shortly thereafter Anna was pregnant and had a baby girl.

Over time her challenges seemed to multiply, she lost effective use of her legs, had difficulty walking, maintaining her balance, could no longer drive, had to give up work and felt she had totally lost her independence. The cumulative effect left her feeling devastated, depressed and unable to go out. However her young baby was a great motivation to survive.

After confronting these setbacks Anna faced the difficult decision as to whether to get a wheelchair. She decided she needed this to get her life back on track and to live independently. Upon adjusting to a wheelchair, suddenly life was very different. She learnt to drive using hand controls and now defiantly proves that it is cool to have a wheelchair, especially if you drive a convertible like Anna. It is also OK to get on with life, have an ego and a wicked sense of humour!

Anna decided to return to work including assisting people with disabilities to find employment. Along the way Anna wanted to have more control about how she was living, so took control of her medication and in choosing to get fit ended up swimming, parasailing and jet skiing .....among other things !



Her new challenging lifestyle led her to trying sailing, where she discovered a new sense of freedom. Through persistence Anna became an accomplished solo sailor competing in Australian and World Championships, going to the Masters Games and winning Gold Medals in competitions. Anna then participated in the 2000 Paralympic trials, where she was the only female among 14 males in the group. While she did not make the final squad, her heavy training regime at the Victorian Institute of Sport was in her words "just awesome".

Anna is a popular, enthusiastic and accomplished public speaker and motivator. Her optimistic outlook supports her determination to enjoy life, her love of sailing and her desire to continue to encourage and inspire others. In deciding to tell her story by writing her book "*Why Not Me? My Journey with MS*" Anna has now provided an honest, personal account of her challenges and achievements.

Anna is determined to make disability insignificant in her life, tries never to be angry when something is difficult and is a great believer that the biggest disability is sometimes "attitude". One of her favorite sayings is: "Yesterday is history, Tomorrow is a mystery".

## Did you know ?

- That planning and planting a low allergen garden can improve the quality of life for some people, especially for avid gardeners who have asthma.
- That a swimmer who is blind has come within 1/100th of a second of qualifying for the Australian Olympic Team.
- That there is now a higher percentage of the Australian population aged 65 or over than at any time in our history.
- That Synchronised Diving will be included for the first time at a Commonwealth Games in Melbourne on the 3m Springboard and 10m Platforms.
- That Pete Townshend, the rock star from the 70's band *The Who*, (they have just returned to touring), is nearly deaf after almost 40 years of performing amongst high noise levels.
- That swimming in Australia has one of the highest participation levels of all sports, both from a competition and a recreation perspective.
- That up to 2.2 million people in Australia have asthma and each week 10 people die from asthma.
- That 92 percent of Australians aged 90 years and older, 41 per cent aged 65 to 69 years and 4 per cent aged 0 to 4 years have a disability.

## Access the Commonwealth Games

In March 2005 a Ticket Ballot will be run, giving all members of the Australian community the chance to secure tickets for the Melbourne 2006 Commonwealth Games. People with disabilities will be able to participate in this ballot equitably.



There will be three types of accessible seating available:

- wheelchair accessible seating space with an adjacent seat for a companion
- "Easy access" seating, providing additional space for a mobility aid, guide dog or the like
- hearing augmentation, e.g. hearing loop or FM system seating.

Ticket prices for people who require a wheelchair and companion space will be at the lowest price available for that particular session, irrespective of the location in the venue, as accessible seating cannot be provided in all price levels and locations.

Alternative formats of the Games Guide can be requested in Braille, large print and audio. Requests for alternative formats of the Games Guide can be made by calling the Melbourne 2006 Commonwealth Games Call Centre on 1300 00 2006 (select option one for reception). Requests could take up to 10 working days to process.

## New Handbooks

AAA has expanded the range of Access Awareness handbooks. New titles are Streetscapes and Footpaths, Parks and Outdoor areas, Playgrounds, Aquatic Areas and Facilities, and How to develop an Access Guide. See our web site or phone 03 9431 3472

### AAA Web site

Details about services provided by Access Audits Australia can be found on our web site at [www.accessauditsaustralia.com.au](http://www.accessauditsaustralia.com.au)

Our site is designed to be accessible for all users. It has AAA W3C level compliance and is AAA Bobby approved. Earlier Access News editions can be downloaded and there are also links to other relevant access related web sites.

Information contained in **Access News** is intended to highlight the importance of improving access for every person

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