

Key insights for Accessible Communities: building belonging for all

A resource generated from the kōrero and collective wisdom shared in the Community Building Block session: Accessible Communities: building belonging for all with Anna Parker and Umi Asaka of the Donald Beasley Institute.

Removing barriers

- Universal design benefits everyone
 - What works for disabled people improves access for all (e.g. ramps, automatic doors)
- Access is everyone's responsibility
 - Move beyond relying on one "champion"
 - Establish clear policy that can foster shared understanding about accessibility
- Start early
 - Build accessibility into planning, not as an afterthought
- Nothing about us without us
 - Centre disabled people's voice
- Access is ongoing
 - Requires continuous reflection and improvement ("getting it right" evolves)
 - Access needs can change as people age
- People shouldn't have to prove their needs
- Trust and relationships matter
 - Access intimacy grows over time

Practical strategies to remove barriers

Physical & Environmental

- Create welcoming environment for people with all kinds of disabilities
- Work with disabled people to understand what welcoming space feels like

- Advocate for:
 - Wider doors, better ramps, lighter doors
 - Accessible toilets and inclusive changing spaces
- Consider sensory needs:
 - Lighting (low/warm), noise, signage, spatial design
- Ask venues detailed access questions (don't rely on labels)

Transport & Access to Place

- Offer alternative meeting locations (closer, familiar, comfortable)
- Provide or adapt transport options (vehicle size, support services)
- Consider weather and timing when planning events

Communication & Information

- Use:
 - Plain language / Easy Read
 - Visual signage and clear wayfinding
 - Interpreters (NZSL, language)
- Provide multiple engagement options:
 - Online + in-person
 - Different formats and communication styles

Systems & Processes

- Include accessibility in:
 - Event checklists
 - Planning documents
 - Emergency planning
- Simplify processes where possible
- Use tools (e.g. AI) to support translation and accessibility

People & Culture

- Build staff capability:
 - Disability awareness training
 - Understanding diverse needs (incl. neurodiversity)
- Recruit and include people with lived experience
- Foster disability leadership within the organisation
- Share responsibility across teams

Disability Community-Led Approaches

- Hold focus groups and co-design with disability communities
- Follow people's lead on what they need
- Uplift and act on disability community voice (not just consult)

Creating Access Intimacy

- Interact with the concept developed by [Mia Mingus](#)
- Build trusting relationships over time
- Reduce the mental load on disabled people needing access
- Challenge the accessibility barriers together
- Know that disabled people have the rights to go and be everywhere

Working within constraints

- Use community resources and partnerships to fill gaps
- Prioritise awareness and attitude shifts when funding is limited
- Advocate collectively for funding and systemic change

Advocacy and systems change

- Educate decision-makers (e.g. building owners, councils)
- Challenge inaccessible design early (especially new builds)
- Ensure accountability when spaces claim to be "accessible"
- Promote the value of accessibility to the wider public
- Celebrate wins to build momentum

Key Takeaway

Accessibility is not a checklist, it's a **continuous, people-centred practice** grounded in:

- Awareness
- Relationships
- Flexibility
- Community leadership