

Access and Inclusion Action Plan Report

January 2025 – June 2025



Acknowledgement of Country

Gladstone Regional Council would like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of this land, the Bailai, the Gurang, the Gooreng Gooreng and the Taribelang Bunda people.

We pay respect to their Elders past, present and emerging.

Gladstone Regional Council is committed to cultivating a culture of inclusion and connectedness, acknowledging that our communities are richer when diversity is embraced.



Introduction

Since the launch of the Access and Inclusion Action Plan in June 2024, Council has continued to make steady and meaningful progress in delivering on our commitments. The past six months have demonstrated not only ongoing implementation of planned actions, but also a growing culture of inclusion across the organisation. Employees remain actively engaged, with momentum building across teams to make our services, spaces, and systems more accessible to all.

Implementation Strategy

Council continues to deliver the Plan in line with the Implementation Strategy. This approach ensures we remain focused, accountable, and responsive to emerging needs and opportunities.

The internal Working Group continues to meet quarterly and has now convened four times. The Working Group plays a key role in tracking action items, removing barriers, and fostering collaboration across teams. In addition to overseeing planned activities, the working group has helped initiate and deliver the Hidden Disability Sunflower Program—an internationally recognised initiative that supports people with non-visible disabilities. This program has been successfully introduced at several Council facilities, offering discreet assistance to those who need it and increasing staff and community awareness.

The Employee Champions group has now been formally established, providing a valuable mechanism for embedding inclusive practices across the organisation. Champions support their colleagues by sharing knowledge, resources, and tools to help keep accessibility and inclusion top of mind.

Training continues to be a central focus. In addition to last year's *Welcoming People Well* and *Community Auslan Classes*, a beginner-level Auslan course was delivered to twelve employees this year. These training opportunities support the development of inclusive communication practices and help build staff confidence when engaging with community members of all abilities. Further employee and community training is scheduled for later in 2025.

Council has continued to engage actively with key stakeholders, including the Gladstone Disability Community Network and Queenslanders with a Disability Network. We also attended community events such as Pride Fair Day and invited feedback through a survey on the accessibility and inclusiveness of Council-run events. Insights from this engagement will help inform ongoing improvements and initiatives. An access and inclusion focussed community forum is scheduled for September 2025 to share our first-year outcomes and gather further feedback.

Council has demonstrated its commitment to the success of the Access and Inclusion Action Plan through strategic investment, including dedicated funding in the 2025/26 budget for



action items and the continued appointment of the Community Development Specialist to oversee implementation and maintain strong stakeholder relationships.

Highlights

Physical Access Upgrades

As part of the Operational Plan 2024/25, a number of accessibility improvements have been delivered over the past six months. Larger works have also been identified and will be outworked over the next two years.

Completed works:

- Lions Park, Boyne Island – connectivity throughout the park has been improved with the addition of concrete pathways linking the accessible amenities, accessible shelter with a wheelchair accessible table, and a wheelchair accessible electric BBQ.
- Wyndham Park, Boyne Island – connectivity between the carpark and an accessible shelter with a wheelchair accessible table has been improved. The work included relocating the accessible parking, installing a ramp from the kerb to the existing pathway and connecting the shelter to the pathway.
- Boyne Tannum Community Centre – accessible parking has been installed for the Heron Room and the Castle Tower Building. Previously there was no accessible parking.
- Air Sea Rescue Park, 1770 – Two accessible beach showers with push button controls have been installed.
- Endeavour Park, 1770 - Two accessible beach showers with push button controls have been installed.
- Tom Jeffrey Park, Agnes Water - Two accessible beach showers with push button controls have been installed.
- Gladstone Aquatic Centre – the car park at the main entrance has been reconfigured to improve the accessible parking.

Welcoming Cities Accreditation

In 2019, Councillor Muszkat recommended Gladstone Regional Council join the Welcoming Cities Network to pursue Welcoming Cities Accreditation—a national benchmark for cultural diversity and inclusion in local government.

In March 2025, after years of gathering evidence across departments, Council proudly earned our accreditation and were encouraged to aim for the Advanced level of accreditation in the future.

We are one of only eight councils in Australia to achieve this, reflecting our commitment to ensuring that everyone in our region can belong, contribute and thrive.

Initiatives from across our organisation that reflect our commitment include:

- **Reconciliation Leadership:** Our dedication through the Reconciliation Action Plan and the incredible efforts of our First Nations Liaison Officer, the RAP Committee and RAP Reference Group set us apart.
- **Strategic Community Development:** Our strengths-based approach drives sustainable, inclusive growth by aligning resources and encouraging active community participation.
- **Inclusive Disaster Preparedness:** Our open engagement with all stakeholders ensures we draw on local knowledge and deliver culturally appropriate solutions during emergencies.
- **Inclusive Workforce Development:** We continue to attract skilled workers who reflect our diverse and vibrant community, bringing unique perspectives and capabilities to the region.

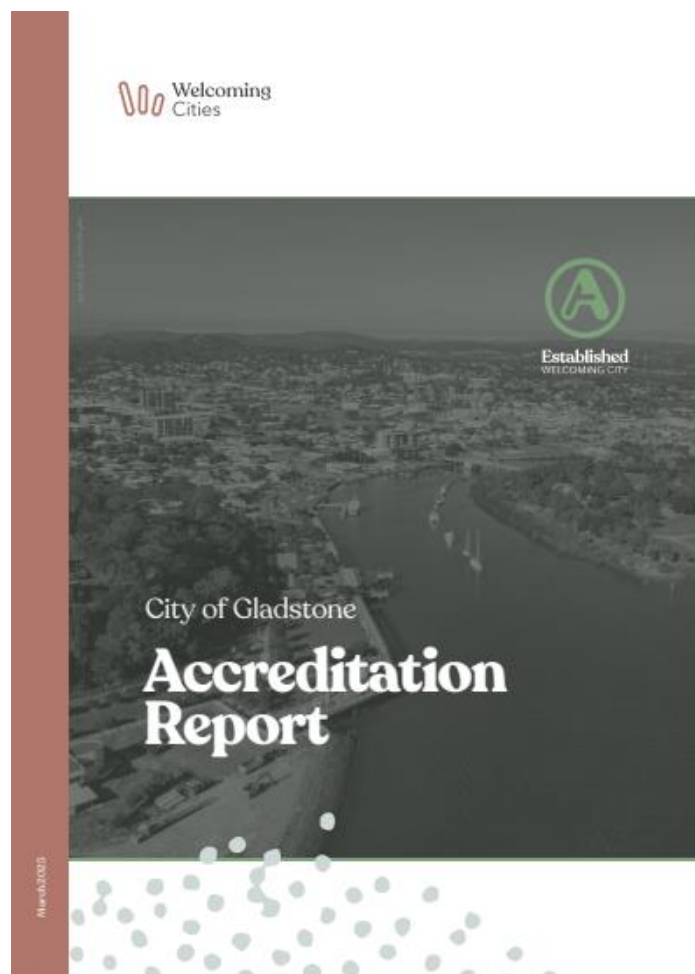


Photo: An image of Council's accreditation report.

Inclusive Recruitment – Pop Up Interviews

Council is taking steps to make recruitment more inclusive by rethinking how we connect with potential employees. Our Parks Team recently trialled a new approach, moving away from traditional written applications and instead hosting pop-up interview sessions in local parklands.

These pop-up sessions gave community members the chance to have a conversation about their skills, experiences, and values in a relaxed and welcoming setting. By shifting the focus to a person's practical skills and personal strengths rather than their ability to write a formal application, this approach helped remove common barriers to employment and opened up opportunities for more people to get involved. The response from participants has been overwhelmingly positive.

Thanks to the success of this approach in hiring Parks and Gardens Labourers, the same method was used to recruit Cleaning Labourers—making it easier than ever for people to find meaningful work with Council.

Auslan Classes for Council Employees

To support better access and inclusion across our services, 12 employees completed a four-week beginner Auslan (Australian Sign Language) course in May and June. Delivered by Lionheart, the training focused on practical communication skills to assist Deaf customers using everyday language. Staff found the course useful and appreciated the opportunity to better support members of our community who use Auslan. This is a small but important step toward improving how we deliver inclusive and accessible services.

Luminous 2025

Council's Community Events team worked tirelessly to make this year's Luminous our most accessible and inclusive event so far.

Accessibility and Inclusion initiatives included:

- **Improved accessible parking, an accessible entrance way, and a new accessible drop-off zone.**

With valuable input from our Community Development Team and local access champion Carmen Jen, we increased the size and visibility of accessible parking near the main gate and introduced a dedicated accessible drop-off zone at the Industrial Car Park. Having Carmen involved in the planning process helped us to identify accessibility barriers that we were able to mitigate before the gates opened.

- **Accessible portable toilets**

- **We hired an accessible portaloo to provide additional accessible bathrooms for the gardens.**
- **Free tickets for carers and companion card holders**
In line with our inclusive approach, carers were able to access free tickets through the GECC Box Office. This ensured that no one was excluded due to support needs. This year we had over 30 carers tickets issued, and we hope to see that number grow in the future.
- **Event staff trained in the Hidden Disability Sunflower Program**
Luminous 2025 marked our second official **Sunflower Friendly Event**, following Ecofest. Event staff received training and wore sunflower lanyards to acknowledge and assist guests with non-visible disabilities.
- **Expanded Zen Zone – our sensory-friendly resting area**
After feedback received last year, we expanded the *Zen Zone* and relocated it to a quieter part of the Gardens. This sensory-friendly area offered a peaceful retreat for anyone needing a break from the crowds.
- **Inclusive food options**
We significantly increased our range of food vendors to accommodate dietary needs and food allergies. Vendors this year offered **gluten-free, dairy-free, lactose-free, halal, vegan and vegetarian** options.

We were thrilled to see an increase in attendees using wheelchairs, walkers, and assistive technologies—a clear indication that our improved accessibility measures made an impact. Most importantly, it was heartwarming to witness people of all backgrounds and abilities attending with their families and friends and enjoying the event together.

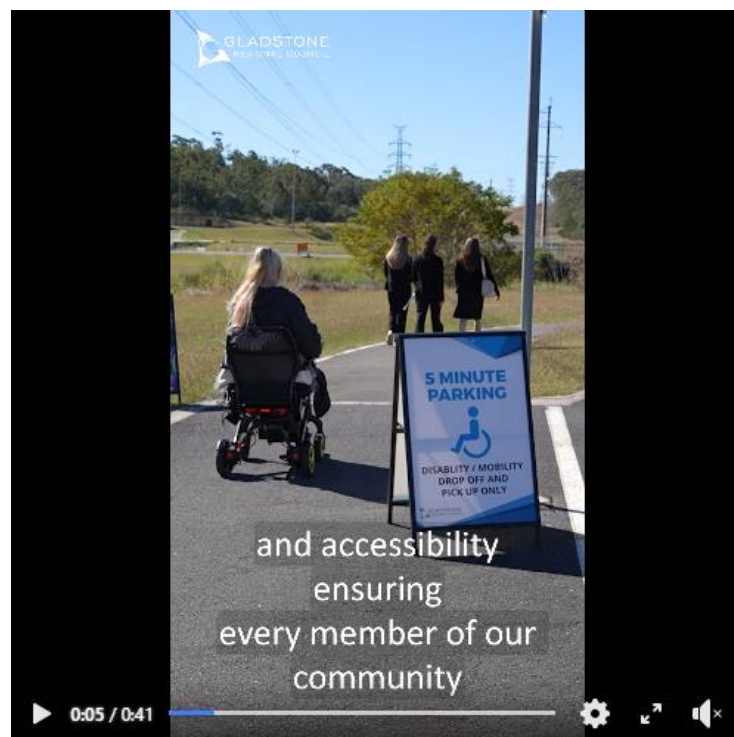


Photo: Carmen Jen from the Gladstone Disability Community Network assisted us in making a video to show the accessible drop off zone and entrance.



Photo: Luminous 2025 – a person in a wheelchair can be seen enjoying the event.

Stories from our community

Significant time, resources, and planning went into ensuring Luminous 2025 was our most accessible and inclusive community event to date. It has been encouraging to see that these efforts have been recognised through the feedback and stories we have received.

Feedback for Luminous 2025:

“Well done GRC for making access and inclusion a priority in your event planning and not just an afterthought.”

“My young person was feeling very overwhelmed at Luminous, but the event staff at the silent disco held space for him and were so welcoming and supportive. He had a great time.”

In response to a post about the Hidden Disability Sunflower and making the invisible, visible, a community member wrote:

“It’s good that you’re noticing.”



Opportunities and Risks Analysis

One year into delivery, we can see a lot of positive changes and momentum. Although some of the action items scheduled for delivery in year one have been postponed until year two due to resourcing constraints, there are some action items that have been completed earlier than anticipated as the team has been able to incorporate the changes into business-as-usual. We are also seeing additional projects come to life that go beyond our original commitment, such as the roll out of the Hidden Disability Sunflower program and the delivery of a new Assistive Hearing System at the GECC. This speaks to the commitment of our staff to improving the accessibility and inclusivity of our services and facilities.

Summary of Amendments/Additions

New timeframes identified

	Responsible Person	Previous Timeframe	New Timeframe	Action Item
1.2.	Strategic Projects Specialist and GM Assets and Environment	2024-2025	2024-2026	Review the Boyne Tannum Aquatic Centre (BTARC) development to determine whether the functionality and level of service aligns with Council's desired standards for inclusion and accessibility.
1.5.	Manager Arts and Entertainment	2024-2025	2025-2026	Deliver an accessible stage for the Gladstone Entertainment and Convention Centre (GECC).
1.8.	Manager Communications and Manager Brand	2024-2025	2025-2026	Create a mobility map of the Gladstone City CBD and Council managed and maintained facilities showing the locations of accessible parking and pathways of travel.
2.3.	Manager Community Partnerships	2024-2025	2024-2026	Investigate the feasibility of implementing an Access and Inclusion Grant to support local sporting and community groups to improve the accessibility of their programs, activities and events.
5.2.	Manager Brand and Manager Communications	2024-2025	2025-2026	Increase the availability of accessibility information (using access symbols) in promotional material for Council led events and activities.
5.6.	Manager Brand	2024-2025	2025-2026	Add inclusive language into our brand guidelines.
6.2.	Manager Community Partnerships	2024-2025	2025-2026	Investigate a collaboration with Sport 4 All to promote inclusive sporting opportunities across the region.

Additional Projects

	Responsible person	Timeframe	Action Item
Add	Manager Arts & Entertainment	2025-2026	Installation of a new and modern Assistive Hearing System in the GECC.



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