**Accessibility is not a checklist**

It is exciting that festivals and event organisers are beginning to routinely ask about accessibility. As an accessibility specialist this fills me with a sense of joy. But as a disabled person who likes to attend arts events, I sometimes find it difficult to predict the level of accommodations I may need.

It’s a common misconception that Deaf and disabled people have a set list of access requirements. But it is not unusual for support needs to ebb and flow. Not just year to year, but even hour by hour.

I’m deaf and rely on lipreading. I hear best in the mornings when my brain is alert and ready to concentrate. As the day goes on, my brain becomes soggy and slow with listening fatigue. My ability to read lips falters. I will lose the thread of conversations.

**Accessibility should never be a checklist exercise**

When working with organisations, I’m often asked for an accessibility checklist. I can understand their desire to tick all the boxes. Unfortunately, a checklist is a one-size-fits-all approach. This fails to recognise that bodies and brains are in a constant state of flux.

So how can organisations make sure they are responsive to dynamic disabilities?

The first step is to recognise that accessibility can fluctuate, and the disabled person is the expert in their access needs. The next step is to create systems that build trust and foster clear communication. Both before and during an event.

**Making a commitment to accessibility**

Next Wave is committed to accessibility. And not the checklist version of accessibility. Next Wave is prioritising listening, taking responsibility and adapting to make sure everyone can participate in all activities.

“Next Wave doesn’t have all the answers, and we still have much work to do in the access space,” says Frances Robinson, Next Wave’s Lead Program Producer. “But we do think that moving beyond the fast-paced festival model and into a slower relational and collective model is a step in the right direction.”

**Access in action**

In 2024, Next Wave is celebrating 40 years. From 24 to 25 May, Next Wave is bringing together artists from across Australia for All School LAB. As an artist-led learning program, events have been designed to facilitate knowledge sharing and idea swapping.

I’ve been working with Next Wave to make the LAB program as accessible as possible.

Here are just some ways that we are weaving accessibility into LAB 2024:

* **Free tickets** are available for Deaf and disabled people and their companions.
* **Access information** about public transport and parking options is available on each event page.
* You can flag any **access requests** when booking tickets. Or you can talk to Frances (Next Wave Lead Program Producer) if you have any questions or concerns about accessibility.
* All of our venues are step-free and **wheelchair accessible**.
* We are creating **visual stories** for every venue. These stories can be downloaded as a Word document or PDF. Each visual story includes information about building entrances, bathroom facilities, lighting, sound and navigation.
* **Auslan interpreters** have been confirmed for the following events:
	+ Nat Randall, On ‘The Second Woman’ — Friday 24 May, 11:00am
	+ Luke King and Ravi Vasavan, On ‘I am a…’ — Friday 24 May, 1:00pm
	+ during:next 40 year party — Saturday 25 May, 6pm -11:00pm
* If you require Auslan at another event, please let us know with at least 48 hours notice before the session is due to start.
* We are hosting a 40-year party on Saturday 25 May. The venue has a **low sensory chill out space** with soft furnishings, low lighting and fidgets. **Personal sensory kits** are available on the door (limited number), which have been designed by Tibi Access. Or feel free to bring your own fidgets.
* There will be music and dancing at the party. You can reserve a **haptic vest**, which is a wearable device that turns music into vibrations.
* We are mindful of **Covid safety**. There will be masks and hand sanitizer available at all events. As well as air purifiers set up at each venue.
* Our friendly, access trained Next Wave staff will be on hand to support at every event.

This is only a brief list of accessibility options. Access information for each event is available on the All School website.

And if you’re coming to the LAB, please let us know if there is anything that you need! We will do our best to accommodate access requests.