

# Universal design in local government: participatory action research findings

PhD Presentation

4<sup>th</sup> Australian Universal Design Conference

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# Bunbury 2015



# Bunbury in ?



Beautiful Bunbury... this classic 180 degree picture captures the ocean, the estuary and the city. Taken from the Bunbury Tower, the picture shows the big area of land to be developed in Bunbury 2000. The Second Stage, formerly the railway marshalling yards.



# Answer: 1985

The point?

- In just 30 years the landscape of Bunbury has been renewed and transformed.
- Opportunities for improving accessibility arise in every day public design – the cycle never stops.
- Public design transforms the landscape. We need to remain engaged with public designers.



**PhD RESEARCH PROJECT:**  
**How can Bunbury**  
**become the**  
***Most Accessible Regional***  
***City in Australia?***

3 year Industry Engagement Scholarship  
Industry partner: City of Bunbury  
Photo: Co-researchers with disabilities  
evaluating the Bunbury Show



# My Co-Reseachers

- 6 people with disabilities, 3 family carers, 2 support workers, 1 PhD student
- Disabilities including stroke, cerebral palsy, spinal injury, intellectual disability, vision impairment, autism, multiple sclerosis, and severe multiple disabilities



Adam has worked professionally in the disability and local government sectors since 1999, and he is currently working towards a PhD researching MARCIA. His father developed a severe disability through stroke in his early 40s.



Dayle had a unique perspective on community access after experiencing a stroke, and was passionate about seeing greater opportunities for inclusion for others like himself. Dayle contributed a great deal to the Research Group, but sadly, passed away in March 2018.



Debbie has an adult daughter who had an accident in 2014 and now uses a wheelchair. Moving back to Bunbury they quickly realised how important access is. Debbie joined the research group to help her daughter's life and others.



Jenna wants to see younger people have more of an awareness of disability and to be educated about it. She has a 10-year old daughter with autism, and has a passion for people from all sectors of the community working together for inclusion.



Ann works at Morrissey Homestead in Bunbury. Siouxi her second child has a severe disability which means she uses a wheelchair and is nonverbal. Ann is passionate about making Bunbury more access-friendly for visitors and residents.



Jacque has worked in the disability sector for 28 years. She has been a support worker, a Social Trainer and relief EA. She enjoys helping people to find ways to improve their quality of life, and making change happen.



Suzanne has cerebral palsy and uses a walker to get around town. She likes to keep active and is involved in a singing group, bootscooting, craft group and more. She wants to see all people with disabilities able to be as active as she is.



Paul sustained a spinal cord injury at 34 years of age and is a wheelchair user. He delivers injury prevention talks in schools, hospitals and workplaces. He wants to see people with disabilities free to integrate with the rest of the community.



Colleen has worked as an education assistant and support worker for the past 17 years, and is a volunteer with WA iSports. She believes in an inclusive community where all can achieve their best, regardless of abilities.



Josef is an advocate for people with intellectual and other disabilities, and has a passion for social inclusion through sport. He helped establish iSports in Bunbury, which has seen many people discover hidden talents and make friends.



Kate has M.S. and while she appreciates that she needs help, she is passionate about getting people to change their way of thinking. She wants people to see the person, not the disability, and to be aware of the need to include others.



Kathryn has low vision and runs her own business as a clinical hypnotherapist and Reiki Practitioner. She was involved in advocacy boards and committees and is passionate about breaking down barriers and adopting a 'can do' attitude.

# What is Participatory Action Research (PAR)?

The term PAR encapsulates three key principles:

- **Participation principle:** the people most affected by the research problem should participate in ways that allow them to share control over the research process;
- **Action principle:** the research should lead to some tangible action within the immediate context;
- **Research principle:** the research process should demonstrate rigour and integrity (McIntyre, 2008; Gaventia & Cornwall, 2008).

# Participation

- PAR seeks to **democratise the act of 'research'** (Pain, 2004).
- It challenges the notion that research is strictly an academic endeavour that should be conducted by 'somebody else' who may be more qualified but less connected to the problem at hand (Pain, 2004).
- Rather, **those most affected by the problem have a role as researchers** of the problem, participating in collective and self-reflective inquiry (Baum, 2006).
- PAR emphasises the importance of **stakeholder participation at all levels of the research process**, including the design, data collection, data analysis and presentation of findings (Kemmis et al., 2014; McIntyre, 2007; Coons & Watson, 2013).
- This stands in contrast to conventional research that is **done 'to' people, rather than 'with' them or 'by' them.**
- In this way the research is **"grounded in the perspectives and interests of those immediately concerned** and not filtered through an outside researcher's preconceptions and interests" (Reason and Bradbury, 2006, p.4).



# Action

- PAR is “working with participants to **achieve the change that they desire**” (Kendon, 2005, p.208).
- The knowledge gained through PAR may be used to equip participants to **take appropriate action within the immediate context** to improve their circumstances, through advocacy and improvements to policies and practices (Kemmis et al, 2014; McIntyre, 2007).
- PAR is aimed at **making changes directly, rather than waiting for someone else** to implement changes based on their reading of the research findings (Noffke, 2009).
- This contrasts with conventional research that emphasises the decontextualizing of data and the production of generalisable theory for application elsewhere (Charmaz, 2014).
- Where conventional researchers may be satisfied with having ‘added to knowledge’ and seeing this as an end rather than a means to an end (Prilleltensky, 1997), proponents of PAR advocate that **there should be “no research without action, and no action without research”** (Adelman, 1975, n.p., cited in Townsend, 2014).

# Research

- The **foundations of research are systematic and rational inquiry**, and PAR is no exception (Noffke, 2009). But, PAR is a **complex, messy and unpredictable** form of inquiry (Baum, 2006).
- The departure from conventional research has led **critics to raise questions around rigour and accountability** (see Kidd & Kral, 2005).
- Guba and Lincoln (1994) argue that rigour and accountability in PAR ought to be evaluated using alternative frames of reference, for example, **trustworthiness and authenticity, rather than reliability and validity**.







# ONE WORD

ENGAGEMENT

2-way

Involved in the community

Involved in planning & execution  
as stakeholder

Ownership, in our shoes

Empowerment

INCLUSION

Get amongst it

Design for inclusion

Design against inclusion

Attitudes - empathy

ACCESS

Design awareness - all types

Too slopy - can't get down

CO-DESIGN





**Jacquie, Suzanne & Dayle investigating access barriers in the City**







**HI I'M JOSEF AND I'M FROM BUNBURY**



















# WELCOME TO THE SOUTH WEST SPORTS CENTRE

## CENTRE INFORMATION



## GOALS



## COMMUNITY & AFFILIATED USER GROUPS





























# Bunbury Accessible Playground 2012



Members of the accessible playground working party Theresa Bowlden and Carolyn Simpson together with Myles Bovell from the City of Bunbury reveal the plans for the accessible playground to be built at Big Swamp.



## A playground for all to enjoy

BUNBURY will soon be home to one of the few accessible playgrounds in the state for children with disabilities to enjoy.

The playground is also

City of Bunbury landscape architect Myles Bovell said the Big Swamp Playground would become a close-knit, safe and inclusive facility for all families.

Nature and a sense of adventure and discovery are also important to the design.

Accessible playground working party members



# Brand new Koombana Bay Playground opened 2018. Not accessible!! Oops.



What went wrong?

# ‘Design’ as key barrier, and facilitator

- Pwds are disabled by design (Bennett, 2002)
- Design is a key barrier – and a key facilitator – to achieving better access and inclusion. Everything is designed!
- Many of the problems identified in accessing the community can be traced back to problems in the design phase of public projects.
- If public infrastructure is not fully accessible, what is wrong with the process of public design?”, and “who is responsible for public design?”.
- Inclusion is a ‘design challenge’. Pwds should participate as partners in the design process.



# LG as innovators and leaders

The *National Disability Strategy: Second Implementation Plan* (Department of Social Services, 2015) contained a strong acknowledgment of the “major role” some local governments play in facilitating participation of people with disabilities, observing that they are often

*“innovators and leaders in how they respond to the special needs of their communities, developing local level solutions to meet the needs of people with disability”* (Department of Social Services, 2015, p.47).

# Problem

- Local Governments not getting it wrong *all* the time, but they're also not getting it 'right' *consistently*.
- **Inconsistent design** outcomes in terms of accessibility features is causing great frustration.
- How then can they get it right ***every*** time?



# Key recommendations to City of Bunbury

1. Systematically **audit** buildings, facilities, and services and eliminate barriers through planning and allocation of resources
2. Foster a culture of **co-design** with people with lived experience of disability
3. Provide all staff who have design responsibilities with regular **training** in Universal Design
4. Ensure design staff regularly consult **technical experts** in Universal Design, especially in major projects
5. Encourage design staff to research, document and apply Universal Design **best practice** (rather than a compliance mentality)
6. Introduce **safeguards** in the design process, eg. checklists, trigger points, contractual requirements for external contractors

# MARCIA RESEARCH FINAL REPORT

May 2018

Prepared for the City of Bunbury

By [Adam Johnson](#)

PhD Candidate, Edith Cowan University



Recommendations unanimously endorsed  
by the full Council of the City of Bunbury  
in July 2018.



# Impact of Research

1. Greater alignment between policies and practices at the City of Bunbury with universal design.
2. Co-design panel created – informing many current infrastructure projects.
3. Universal design standards adopted.
4. Staff / contractors trained in Universal Design.
5. \$100,000 p.a. for auditing and retrofitting

# When we get it right...





# When we don't: Bunbury's Koombana Bay Lookout built in 2020 by State Gov't



In the News: SUBSCRIBER EXCLUSIVE WA NEWS PAGE 13 OPINION POLITICS AFL DRAFT BUS

## NEWS > SOUTH WESTERN TIMES

### You-beaut lookout's access hitch

Zoe Keenan South Western Times  
Tuesday, 19 November 2019 9:33AM



 The lookout opened recently but is not accessible by wheelchair. Picture: Zoe Keenan



Bunbury residents can finally access their much-anticipated lookout tower in Koombana Bay, but a planning oversight means the lookout is not accessible to everyone.

Sitting 15m above sea level and providing 360-views of Bunbury and Koombana Bay,





