

National Cultural Policy Submission

Carly Findlay

I am a writer, speaker, artist and arts worker. I am writing to you as a freelance artist, and also as Access Advisor at Melbourne Fringe.

My bio is:

Carly Findlay works as Melbourne Fringe's Access Advisor. She works to educate artists, venues and the wider arts sector in creating accessible shows; and builds and maintains close relationships with Deaf and disabled artists.

Outside of Fringe, Carly is an award-winning writer, speaker and appearance activist. Her first book, a memoir called Say Hello, was released in January 2019. Carly edited the anthology Growing Up Disabled in Australia with Black Inc Books, published in February 2021. She writes on disability and appearance diversity issues for news outlets including the ABC, The Age and Sydney Morning Herald, SBS, CNN and Vogue. In 2020, Carly Findlay received a Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) for her work as a disability advocate and activist. She's a new rollerskater, a lifelong Darren Hayes fan and has never met a cheese she didn't like.

My work in the arts and in the disability community has made me realise that Art as a career is not recognised for disabled people. I get many questions from NDIS users as well as support workers and parents asking how NDIS funding can be used to participate as an artist, and also as an audience member. However, there is no concrete advice on this from the NDIS, or the wider Government. Arts is seen to be therapy or a hobby for disabled people, rather than a job.

Some of the things I'd like to see improved for disabled people, especially disabled artists, include:

Meaningful work for meaningful pay - too often artists and also disabled people are expected to work for free, and disabled artists even more so. It's like people think we have nothing better to do than to wait around for a volunteer opportunity. But we deserve meaningful work and meaningful pay.

Regular inclusion in the media - which will lead to raised expectations for disabled people. We shouldn't only have to talk about disability - we need to talk about all issues, our disability should be incidental. The Project, QAndA should have regular disabled panelists - we are 1/5 of the population. Development of an informed guide to how the NDIS can be used to support disabled artist's careers; and can support people who want to participate in the arts as an audience member. This guide needs concrete examples of how the NDIS can be applied in the arts, based on disabled artists, arts workers and audience members' expertise. The NDIA staff and Dept of the Arts Staff need to be informed too.

Job Access provisions for freelance artists - I have engaged with Job Access in my work at Melbourne Fringe - to coordinate it for staff here. But I have not been able to get it as a freelance artist myself. I was denied an airline lounge membership for me as a freelancer - but a lounge is part of my accessibility provisions.

A separate budget to create access in all arts projects - especially for disabled artists. Access costs money, and artists need to be funded to create accessible work. This cost should be considered as an additional cost in the production budget.

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