



The  
**Inclusive  
Filmmaking**  
Toolkit

#inclusivefilmmaking

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# Welcome

## Why do we need a toolkit?

This Inclusive Filmmaking Toolkit will provide our screen and creative industries with an essential resource to help guide our sector to become more inclusive and disability-confident. The toolkit will outline best practice principles to provide the most appropriate support and achieve greater and more meaningful inclusion of people living with disability on both sides of the camera.

With 20% of Australians identifying as living with disability, and as the largest minority group in the world, this is a huge part of the community that could, and should, be better represented in the industry. This toolkit will better enable filmmakers, production companies and creatives at all levels of the industry to ensure their filmmaking practice is inclusive and people with disability are better represented in stories about them!

# What is Disability?

According to Article 1 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability (UNCRPD), persons with disability include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.

Currently, in alignment with the UNCRPD, it is best practice to view disability via the social model of disability, which we outline below.

## Social Model of Disability

The Social Model of Disability views disability as a socially-constructed event or experience. It looks at the “disability” being present due to the barriers put up by the environment – social, physical, environmental, attitudinal and communication inhibitors – at odds with a person’s disability, rather than the disability itself being an issue.

“A social model perspective does not deny the reality of disability nor its impact on the individual. However, it does challenge the physical, attitudinal, communication and social environment to accommodate disability as an expected incident of human diversity.

The social model seeks to change society in order to accommodate

It is interesting to note when looking at disability that it is a minority cohort in which any of us can find ourselves.

We can acquire a disability at any stage in our lives, due to age, genetics, injury or illness. We can’t change our cultural background, race or age but we can move from being a person without disability to a person living with disability. It is a paradigm that is transcendent within the human experience.

people living with disability; it does not seek to change persons with disability to accommodate society. It supports the view that people with disability have a right to be fully participating citizens on an equal basis with others” (People with Disability Australia).

For more information on the social model, as well as other models, refer to [this helpful resource](#).



Mandy and Audrey on set of 'Not Another Wallflower'

# Inclusive filmmaking

Leading the way for over a decade

## Bus Stop Films

The Bus Stop Films filmmaking model has been refined over 10 years of inclusive filmmaking and is still growing and developing. Starting out on a small scale with a bold vision and strategy to include people with disability in filmmaking, Bus Stop Films has been a leader in this style of filmmaking since its inception.

The key elements of this model are delivered through an Accessible Film Studies Program, a 40-week program governed and informed by a curriculum that teaches tertiary level film studies subjects. The elements of the course and subsequent film production mandate that people with disability, that is, the filmmaking

students, are involved in every aspect of the filmmaking process.

Students are actively involved in above and below the line roles, with each project giving an opportunity for students to learn new aspects of filmmaking from directing, writing and cinematography, right through to costume, make up, production design and editing. Students are engaged in project development and pre-production, on set in production, and in post-production.

When it comes to production we have a base line rule that students are on set 90% of the time. The students can be rotated through the

key units on a set in a roster, offering them experience in all aspects of the production and conversely offering all aspects of the production the benefit of their experience. Moving into post-production, students view the rushes with an editor and offer their notes and suggestions on the final cut.

Moving forward to the exhibition of the films, students often attend festivals and appear on industry Q&A panels, offering their insight to audiences as any other filmmaker would do. The process is inclusive from the development of the script through to the red carpet.



1. Zachariah in class at Bus Stop Films 2. Jordan in class at Bus Stop Films 3. Erin, Steven and Alex on set of 'The Interviewer' 4. Katherine in class at Bus Stop Films 5. Dina on set of 'Not A Wallflower'



1. Filming on set of 'Work Mate' 2. Ricky & Steven on set of 'The Interviewer' 3. Working with the Japanese Down Syndrome Association on set of 'Shakespeare in Tokyo' 4. Digby on set of Special Olympic's 'Australia's Greatest Champion'

## Taste Creative

Taste Creative has built its foundations on telling world-class stories that authentically and inclusively reflect the people of the world, with a particular passion for collaborating with people living with disability.

Taste understands the creative industry; it offers a platform to redefine the perception of people with disability and improve inclusive attitudes throughout all industries.

Taste Creative's Inclusively Made initiative is derived from its core commitment to inclusion, with a focus on creating meaningful employment pathways in the creative industry for people living with disability.

As part of this initiative Taste Creative works collaboratively to create high-quality film and creative content and uses this space to explore authentic stories that empower the disability community. This is achieved by collaborating with people with lived experience throughout the storytelling process, as well as providing people with disability meaningful employment within the creative industry.

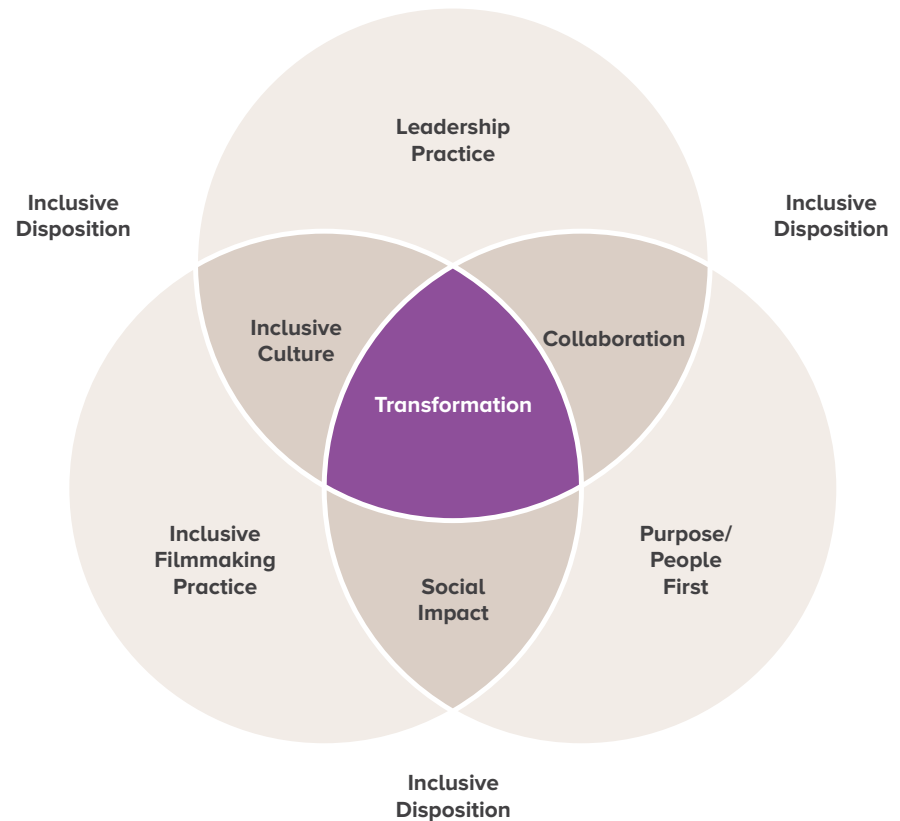
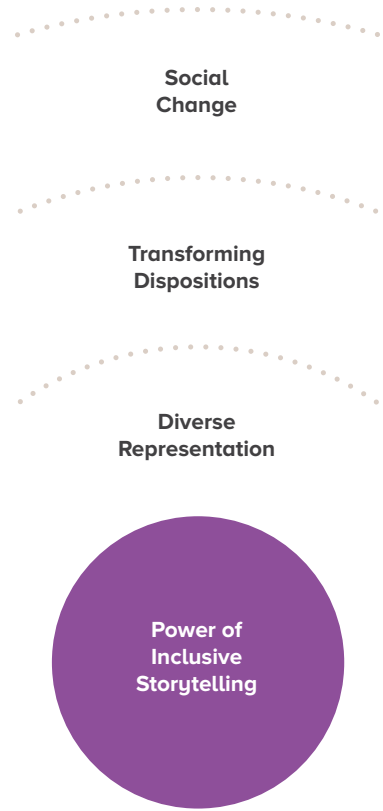
Inclusively Made aims to shape a world where the stories that are told are truly reflective of all people in society and to shift the conversation about people with disability from feeling "inspired" to "empowered".

# A Method Backed by Research

In 2019, Bus Stop Films was the subject of international research on The Theory of Dispositions in Filmmaking and Leadership by Professor Kyja Kristjansson-Nelson. The purpose of the study was to determine how best to create more inclusion in media arts education and filmmaking through leadership practices.

The report concluded, “Having identified dispositions as an active catalyst within leadership practices and filmmaking practices, film and media arts educators may wish to examine programmatic standards for professional practice, as well as pedagogical practices that prioritize aspects of collaboration and inclusion over product and the auteur.

Working toward such changes will place greater emphasis on the need for an inclusive culture, in which all



voices can participate without the interference of attitudinal barriers.”

The research also noted, “Within Bus Stop Films, inclusive leadership and inclusive filmmaking, combined with a ‘people first’ purpose, created

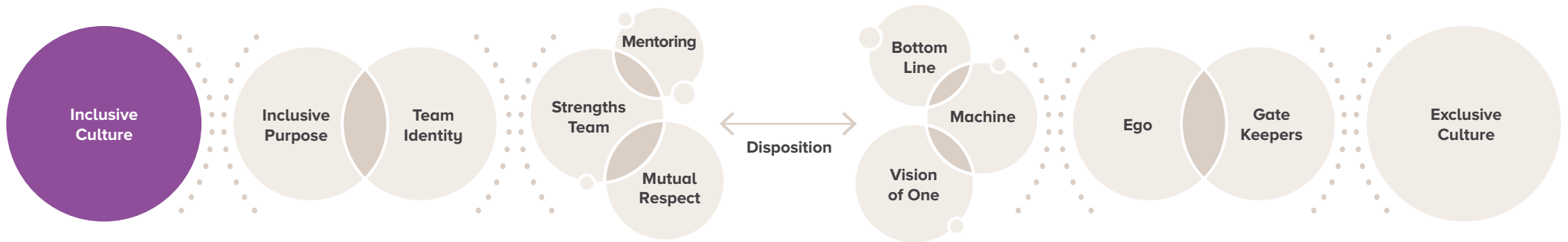
an inclusive culture driven by collaboration between team members

who are committed to the social impact of their work. At the heart of these relationships, transformation was evident; transformation of students, transformation of industry

professionals, and the transformation of audience perspectives.”

Bus Stop Films categorically delivers inclusion through filmmaking practice and film education.

# Dimensions of Filmmaking Culture and Leadership





# Attitudes and Language

## Historical Attitudes

Throughout history, people with disability have been discriminated against, segregated and even treated as sub-human. For centuries, societies and cultures across the world have encultured systemic views of people with disability being “less” than people without disability.

Within Australia, there is a shameful history of the segregation and institutionalisation of people with disability which has had a major impact on people with disability having equal opportunity in society. Traditionally, people with disability have been barred from equal participation in education, social opportunities, the workforce, the open

housing market and even healthcare. Often hidden away throughout history, the entrenched low expectations and social narrative of shame associated with disability has meant that equality for people with disability in society is limited and gate-kept by those without disability.

The post-war period of Australia forced the community to rethink attitudes to disability with returned soldiers now living with mental health issues such as PTSD, facial difference and injuries, raising the number of people living with disability among the community. This also led to government responses to disability to deal with the growing number

of people acquiring disability. The movement towards support and rehabilitation of the 1970s and ‘80s heralded new opportunities.

There is still a long way to go when it comes to removing the systemic low expectations and prejudice towards people with disability and ensuring that people with disability can have equal access to quality education, housing, health care, social opportunities and employment of choice.

## The Bus Stop Films Attitude

Bus Stop Films' inclusive filmmaking model began with the notion of Nothing About Us, Without Us, and it has stayed that way. In 2009 Genevieve Clay-Smith and Gerard Dwyer partnered together to make the short film, Be My Brother. Genevieve, who co-wrote the film with Gerard, realised that if she was going to direct a film about a man with disability, she needed to make the film with people with disability and ensure that people with disability were benefiting from the project being made. This led to one of her first accessible film studies classes, with six people with disability in a friend's living room. She taught the six various onset protocols and crew roles and then together with

those six people and crew members without disability made the award-winning film, Be My Brother, now significant for being the catalyst from which Bus Stop Films was created.

Our beliefs about disability are aligned with the UNCRPD and the social model. This means that there is always a way to include people and work to their strengths. It's about collaborating with people and finding out "how we include" rather than looking at "why we can't include".

The Bus Stop Films curriculum and film studies program promotes inclusivity and cultural diversity in an approach that flows on from Article 26 of the UN's Universal Declaration

of Human Rights and Article 6 of UNESCO's Declaration on Cultural Diversity. Our purpose is to provide an inclusive curriculum and film studies program that seeks to "remove that which excludes and marginalises" (ARACY, 2013, p6); a curriculum that is sustainable over time; and a curriculum that is engaging and understanding of diverse abilities. It is a curriculum based on students observed needs and intends to provide students with an engaging and purposeful means of improving skills in literacy, communication and comprehension through film studies and the practice of filmmaking.

This curriculum aims to provide transformational outcomes to improve language and communication skills; social and cognitive skills; collaboration and work-readiness skills; and life skills for students who have been unable to access an arts education at a post-secondary level due to circumstances beyond their control. This curriculum meaningfully addresses the need to provide access to equal opportunity

in learning and an entry pathway into the film industry.

A core part of the Bus Stop Films curriculum is the social and experiential (Bandura & Walters, 1977; Kolb, 2015) that students receive. By studying concepts of



Alex, Erin and Winston on set of 'The Interviewer'

narrative, creative tasks, technical concepts, teamwork exercises and creative practice, students and teachers work together to remove a pervasive barrier that associates "low expectations" with certain vulnerable groups (whether intentionally or unintentionally) and their ability to learn.

This program aims to give students a learning experience which encompasses what one would learn theoretically and practically at film schools around the world. Students can then apply their newfound knowledge and skills by connecting with others in the film industry, either in a classroom setting, in a studio or on film sets, and further develop ways to become filmmaking practitioners.

Every subject in this curriculum reflects back to the art of storytelling. By linking storytelling, language, communication skills and comprehension via the multi-modal craft of filmmaking this program can be delivered to individuals in need of brain plasticity support; individuals living with mental health issues; refugee communities; CALD communities; and other vulnerable community groups. Numerous scientific studies of the brain have found that storytelling

has a correlation to cognition and behaviour (Herman & Childs, 2003; Mellmann, 2012; Gottschall, 2012; Zak, 2013; Ferretti, 2016). Students who, in traditional eyes, are viewed as not capable become empowered through knowledge and skills acquisition; gain an improved ability to have conversations and opinions with some authority on film; and find greater social inclusion for work and life in general (Feng & O'Halloran, 2013; Lawrence & Paige, 2016). This curriculum instils high expectations in our students' capabilities to learn and gives them opportunities to learn creatively, to flourish, to develop and to grow their well-being and future aspirations.

Ultimately, we have high expectations of our filmmakers with disability and we explore their strengths. We try to cultivate this and we make reasonable adjustments where necessary in order to ensure they are included.



Chris and AJ on set of 'The Interview'

While we have a focus on education and training for our students, producers and filmmakers can take these values into their own productions to help keep inclusion at the fore at all times. Here are the values we focus on in the delivery of our programs.

## High Expectations

In all of our actions, process, classes and film projects the students are front of mind and are involved at each step of the way. We have high expectations of them and we don't predict what they can't do before giving them the opportunity to try. We ensure that our film projects, from the start of the process to the end, are made inclusively with students.

Our students are required to be on set 90% of the time to gain the full mentorship opportunity; this means our cast and crew are being supported by an inclusive team throughout the production.



1. Students in film class at Bus Stop Films  
2. Jahmia and Jamie on set of 'Kill Off'

## Transparency and Open Communication

We value feedback and honesty throughout our programs and film projects. We understand that as part of the process things may not always run smoothly; however, transparency in our actions and open communication allow us to make the changes needed and to work in a positive environment. We never assume what someone might or might not need. It's always best to have an open and honest conversation about access needs; if any adjustments need to be made; and how to make the environment welcoming for someone who has disability.

There is nothing wrong with asking an honest and respectful question about how to ensure someone feels like they can fully participate. For example:

"We want to make sure you have a great time on set/in the office, so I would love to know if there's anything we can do to make that happen. Do you have any access requirements or reasonable adjustments that we should make? Is there anything you would like us to be aware of in order to ensure you can fully and equally participate?"

Then keep the conversation open and ensure the person with lived experience feels welcome to teach you!

"Please let us know if there is anything we need to change along the way; we would love to learn from your experience so we can be inclusive of more people and grow our confidence in this space."

## Patience, Creativity and Understanding

We create environments where people with disability can feel empowered, and our tutors and filmmakers can bring their passion to the classroom or the studio to create engaging, interactive and inclusive activities and experiences.

Patience is a large part of ensuring our classes and productions meet our high standards. We support our tutors and filmmakers to exercise

patience and to work with students to keep them on task or identify ways to support them through any challenging situations.

Things may not work as planned, ideas fall over, but through patience and flexibility you can refocus how you work to support a person with disability on your project in a manner that is mutually beneficial.



## Commitment and Dedication

We are strong believers in giving 100% to everything we do. Both tutors and students, and the filmmakers with whom we work, are accountable to our program guidelines and production goals enforcing a commitment to inclusion through the program and learning outcomes. There is no such thing as “I can’t” at Bus Stop Films. It’s “I can, I will, we will make it work!”



1.



2.



3.

1. Abby, Mandela, Genevieve, Jamie and Mark on set of 'Kill Off' 2. On set of Rio Tinto's 'Including You' 3. Henry and Josh on set of 'Perspective Shift'

## Respect and Professionalism

Our classrooms and sets foster a community of respect and unity with no exceptions. Tutors, students and filmmakers are required to be respectful to each other at all times.

We maintain an industry-standard level of professionalism on our sets, for safety and courtesy for all, no matter what. Differences may arise but they must be discussed, managed and explored with respect. Working with people with disability does not mean poor behaviour or attitudes are tolerated from anyone – a person with disability or without. We hold everyone accountable to conducting themselves with respect. A good set is one where respect is maintained at all times, and this applies to all.

# Myths and Stereotypes

## Disability and Employment



*All of the staff who worked with Joni during her time at ESA expressed that she was an absolute delight to have in the office. Her number one attribute is that she is passionate about the television industry and is keen to learn. She was confident in asking questions, took notes when being briefed on work practices, and was always attentive and interested.*

Post-work experience report from the team at MasterChef EndemolShine Australia for Bus Stop Films student Joni Campbell

### **Myth: People with disability are best suited to unskilled work**

A common myth is that people with disability can only work in unskilled jobs. However, we know people with disability have a wide range of skills and talents which they can bring to the workplace.

### **Myth: It will cost me more to hire a person with disability**

There may be additional costs to hire someone with disability; however, if we view this as a drain, we may miss out on the myriad of benefits having that person on the production will bring. Rather than seeing costs associated with inclusion as “draining”, “additional” or “unnecessary”, we need to view them as investments in

the production. Shifting the idea to costs being beneficial investments means that we see this as a value-add. For some people, there will be no increase in costs to employers around insurance, admin or production costs.

However, if there are additional costs, we must consider the benefits of the cost and investment first, rather than be dismissive.

### **Myth: Employing a person with disability on my production will make everything take longer**

In general, we work with up to 15 people with disability on our sets at any one time. Our productions rarely run over time, in fact we often finish ahead of schedule, a win for any filmmaker!

### **Myth: People with disability won't fit in with the rest of the crew**

Given that people with disability make up 20% of the Australian population it is likely that your cast and crew have a relative or friend with disability. Feedback from the crews that work with our students on both our own and other productions is that their presence increases crew morale and that the workplace is better for it. Filmmaking is truly a team sport.

### **Myth: Employing people with disability won't change broader community attitudes**

Research shows that the most effective way of countering negative attitudes towards people with



*In my opinion the most disabling forces in our society have nothing to do with disability and everything to do with stigmas, prejudice and presumptions. Our productions at Taste Creative and Bus Stop Films do not get slowed down because we include people with intellectual disabilities; quality is not compromised; and it is not harder to make a film or produce work with people who have intellectual disabilities on set. In fact, our crews adore working on our films because they love to mentor and help others to learn and grow.*

Genevieve Clay-Smith  
Co-Founder; Bus Stop Films  
Co-Founder & Director; Taste Creative

disability is through direct exposure to people with disability. So, while you may only have one person in your team identifying as living with disability, the flow on effect to the team around them and outwardly into the team's broader networks is profound.

# Impact on Cast and Crew

How does Inclusion Impact Filmmaking and Experience of Cast and Crew?

*From what I have witnessed after a decade of facilitating inclusive film sets with people with and without disability is that the culture of our sets changes. Typically, the film industry is extremely hierarchical; however, this dissipates on an inclusive film set.*

**Genevieve Clay-Smith, Co-Founder Bus Stop Films and Co-Founder & Director Taste Creative**

Genevieve Clay-Smith states, "Everyone becomes a teacher, and I mean everyone, because people without disability are learning and people with disability are learning. Many people have said to me that the environment of an inclusive film set is unlike anything they have ever experienced.

People feel that there is purpose behind what they are doing, they are not just serving an auteur's vision – the way in which we are making the film and how we treat people is just as important as the end result of the film. And that is very different to how the industry has traditionally operated."

A key part of inclusive filmmaking is attitude. Bring your team on the journey with you and talk to them about working with people with disability. Where possible, have some meet and greets beforehand to build the relationships.



1. Emma and Kirsty on set of 'Work Mate' 2. David on set of 'Gambling with Minds' 3. Digby and Thomas on set of 'Work Mate' 4. Henry on set of Rio Tinto's 'Including You' 5. AJ and Chris on set of 'The Interviewer'

# Nothing About Us, Without Us

#nothingaboutuswithoutus

This is a slogan used to express the idea that no policy or project should be decided by any representative without the proper and meaningful inclusion of the members of the group/s affected by the policy/project. This reflects not only people with disability but all marginalised groups.

True inclusive filmmaking in relation to people with disability means including people with disability in all aspects of the project development and execution, and ensuring that those people benefit from the project being made.

If your project includes Indigenous themes or issues you must follow the Screen Australia guide; a filmmaker's guide to working with Indigenous people, culture and concepts. Similarly, when exploring intersectional aspects of disability such as broader cultural diversity or

the experience of those from culturally and linguistically diverse background or the LGBTIQ+ communities, connect with and seek input from members of those community groups.

**Screen Australia:**  
**Pathways & Protocols**



1. Adrian on set of 'Francis & Annie' 2. Zacheriah working on set of 'I Am Black and Beautiful'



## I Am Black and Beautiful

Take a look at the making of our inclusively made film 'I Am Black and Beautiful'. This film was inclusively made by our AFTRS program students with Afro-Australian director, Hawanatu Bangura along with the class tutor and producer, Sarah Jane Johnson.

[See how the film was made](#)



# Inclusive Language

It can be difficult to keep up with what is the acceptable terminology in relation to disability. People with disability prefer to define who they are, so as you build relationships with individuals with disability you will learn what the individual prefers. For instance, the late Stella Young preferred being called a disabled person. Where that term has been politically incorrect in the past, many people reclaiming it. When it comes to the UNCRPD, the terminology of impairment is an accepted way to refer to disability, as the individual is impaired because of social and environmental structures not accommodating of them. However, many individuals prefer not to use this term.

Language is always changing and very personal to each individual. In this context, it is recommended that person-first language is used, as opposed to “the Disabled”, as it is still universally the most accepted way to address people with disability.

Examples of person-first language:

- Person with disability or people with disability;
- Person who is d/Deaf or a person who is hard of hearing or hearing impaired;
- Person who is blind or a person with low vision or vision impaired;
- Person without disability, not “able-bodied” or “non-disabled”;
- Wheelchair user or someone who uses a wheelchair,

not wheelchair “bound” or “confined”;

- A man or woman with Down syndrome, not “Downs person” or “they’ve got Downs”.

Recognise the person’s individuality:

- Focus on the person rather than disability, be respectful and just get to know them as an individual.

Extend appropriate language to facilities that support people with disability:

- “Accessible facility”, e.g. toilet/ car space, not “Disabled facility”.

“It is so important that everybody ‘sees’ themselves in the stories that

we absorb on TV, at the movies and online.” says Taste Creative Co-Founder, Henry Smith. “When we regularly do not see people that look and sound like us, we are subconsciously told that we do not fit in and we do not matter.

So, if 20% of Australians are people living with disability, we should be seeing a lot closer to this number of people with disability reflected in our stories. And not just as a lowly character with a disability, but as prominent, world-changing characters. A more accurate portrayal.”

*At Taste Creative, we believe that you cannot tell someone’s story without empowering them to be a part of the storytelling. That’s why we create career paths for people living with disability to work on professional film projects behind the scenes, and work side-by-side people with disability to collaboratively tell stories that authentically represent our whole society.*

**Henry Smith**  
Executive Creative Director  
and Co-Founder; Taste Creative



# Inclusive filmmaking and Creative Co-creation

## What Isn't Inclusive Filmmaking?

Crafting roles for people with disability or other marginalised groups on screen is a significant step towards greater representation in storytelling and casting, but it's only the tip of the iceberg towards inclusive filmmaking.

If people with disability are not involved in the key process of the production, then has true inclusion taken place? Our answer is no. You can't simply cast a person with disability and call it an inclusive film if you haven't included people in the process of making the film.

All you have done is make a casting choice; that's as far as you have gone.

## What Is Inclusive Filmmaking?

#Inclusivefilmmaking has been the mantra of Bus Stop Films since its inception and this tone has also underpinned the work of Taste Creative, the creative agency which incubated Bus Stop Films for nine years before it became sustainable. Inclusive filmmaking means inclusion throughout all aspects of the process. Inclusive filmmaking is just that, involving people with disability or other marginalised groups in the end-to-end filmmaking process. Every company or film production can be inclusive right now, even if it is just one role in one aspect of production.

Anyone can include people with disability at any time; it comes down to your attitude.

Here are some actions you might like to implement to help you become more inclusive:

### Writing authentically

Consider your storyline and invite members of the relevant disability community into your writers' room. Give this representative your trust. Authenticity in story telling is a brilliant outcome from inclusion. Furthermore, it ensures your representation of disability, should you be writing on the topic, is authentic and truthful.

### Case Study:

The writers of 'Offspring' introduced a character with a vision impairment that would 'see' someone by touching

their face with his hands. Actor Ben Phillips who has a vision impairment and was cast for this role, corrected them on set, but if they had included someone with vision impairment in the writers' room, this wouldn't have been an issue.

### Create opportunities

Look for opportunities in the production office to engage a person with disability in the team. This could

be an internship, work experience or paid role. We all have to start somewhere and in this "exclusive" industry, getting a foot in the door is the first step. Sometimes that love-job you do on a student film may be just the amount of experience needed to score a paid role on another production. Frame opportunities like this and consider a person with disability on your crew.



Filming on location in Japan for 'Shakespeare in Tokyo'



Alessio on set of 'Kill Off'

### Adapting tasks

Consider how the pre-production period and tasks could be adapted to be more inclusive. There is much to do around sound design, lighting, wardrobe, set design and casting that offers a suite of opportunities to involve a person with disability.

### Authentic casting

When casting roles, consider how you might include people with disability as extras or other roles that could be undertaken by a person with disabilities. Authentic casting is the gold standard of inclusive filmmaking, and we'll cover that in more depth shortly.

### Consider capabilities

Consider the departments in the production, how each team is resourced and what roles a person with disability could undertake. A buddy system on set is a great way to offer an opportunity for a person with disability to learn through mentoring.

Consider rotating the opportunities to work through different units to learn new skills, and get a feel for their preferences.

### Inclusive in post

Editing and post-production offer a unique set of tasks and situations that present synergistic opportunities for people with disability. The structured

and sometimes relative straightforward processes of editing seem to bode well with our students on the Autism Spectrum, delivering high quality work outputs through inclusive filmmaking.

### Support

There are a wealth of job support services and government programs available to support employing people with disability in longer-term roles, e.g. beyond three months. Additionally, some people with disability have funds in their NDIS packages for assistance with skills development and social engagement, which can support them in connecting to work opportunities.

*I loved working with Giuliano. Giuliano started working in post-production while we were shooting so he would see the rushes come in every day and learnt about that process while I was on set. I then invited him to set for the last three days of the shoot as we were shooting a whole episode. So, I thought he would be able to watch the monitor (he also did some slates too) and see how it worked on set and would then be able to recognise the scenes and what we chose moving into the edit.*

*He came in and observed throughout the edit and got to learn the process of rough cuts and network screenings and see how the episodes shaped together. I absolutely loved him being the office, he really brought great energy and spirit on set and in post-production. I think it's such a valuable grant to have and we also learnt a lot from Giuliano and would love to work with more people from Bus Stop Films in the future.*

Gracie Otto  
Director; The Other Guy [Series 2]



# Changing the Narrative

## Storytelling that Aligns with the Social Model and United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability

When filmmakers ask us how to go about writing a story about disability, the question we often ask back is: who are your friends with disability? More often than not, people without disability who have no connection to the community, and no friends or relationships with people with disability, try to represent disability on screen. What often happens is that their own ableist point of view pervades. This includes those people who have family members with disability; the stigmas, prejudice and low expectations that impact society also infiltrate the mindsets of family members. So just being related to someone doesn't mean you can tell the story authentically. In order to do this, you need inclusivity.

Disability is often seen through the lens of tragedy and “Inspiration Porn” – showcasing people with disability doing well or achieving success “despite” their disability to extract sympathy. Other strong tropes are that people with disability are asexual; that we must save or fix the person with disability; we must pity them; excuse bad behaviour from them; or mock or ridicule them. In some cases film narratives have told the audience that it is better to be dead than have a disability, such as the 2016 romance film, *Me Before You*, which had major backlash from the disability community. These are all variations on a theme that is often presented in storytelling around disability.

However, if we change the narrative towards a more inclusive and empowering point of view we can create a volume of endless dynamic and respectful stories through our craft. Reflecting on the social model of disability and the UNCRPD, we should “undertake to ensure and promote the full realization of all human rights and fundamental freedoms for all persons with disabilities without discrimination of any kind on the basis of disability.”

Consider creating content involving people with disability that moves past the disability, setting stories of people first, who just happen to live with disability. Moving their disability from being the focus to an incidental aspect of their lives. This can only be achieved through co-creation and collaboration with people with disability and being involved in the community.



Prue on set of 'Perspective Shift'



Kenta on set of 'Shakespeare in Tokyo'

# Cultural and Social Benefits

## Cultural and Social Benefits to Inclusive Filmmaking

Filmmaking is a powerful tool to share culture between communities and promote cultural connections. Inclusive filmmaking helps break down stigmatised attitudes to disability that can be present in some communities. It helps progress disability rights and showcases to the community the capacity, capability and contribution of people with disability to our society. The connection we gain through seeing other cultures and people different from ourselves helps bring people together; barriers to understanding are broken down and sharing is encouraged when we see others in the stories of our communities. Socially, seeing people with disability living fulfilling lives where they are contributing members of society showcases the fact that people with disability are not to be pitied or praised for simply living their lives. They are people who, like everyone else, want to belong, be accepted and be included in all aspects of society, including open employment.

## Cultural Benefits to the Film Industry

The film set culture of our projects is uniquely positive and encouraging – a place where people are celebrated, respected and valued no matter what role they perform. The director of the projects we make is not an auteur; they are a “servant leader” serving the team and putting the wellbeing of the crew first, ensuring that the experience of making the film is just as important as the end result.

Our directors will not sit above the crew, they will help take out the trash and make cups of tea for the other crew members. Which is not how a set is traditionally run. Servant leadership is how inclusive filmmaking works; people in leadership positions understand that the reason why we are making a film is to include people who are traditionally excluded and to transform and challenge the way

films are traditionally made. We believe it is a better way of doing things and it certainly doesn't hinder the end result.

Traditionally, the organisational structure of film projects is severely hierarchical. Above the line roles are at the top and below the line roles are expected to follow orders. This pyramid structure can often lead to negative consequences in the lives of crew and fosters exclusion. Filmmaking projects do not have an organisational structure which allows for accountability to a Human Resource manager. Those leading the projects seldom ever have experience in HR, conflict resolution training or the experience and expertise to deal with complaints of bullying, harassment and abuse. It is one of the reasons behind #MeToo movement; a lack of accountability and abuse of power in a hierarchical structure can result in people becoming exploited without any consequences for fear of not being hired again later on.

Inclusive filmmaking works in the opposite way to traditional filmmaking. Instead of the “auteur”, where the project is more important than the people making it, the people making



1. The cast on set of 'I Am Black and Beautiful'  
2. Steve on set of 'Work Mate'

the project are more important than the work. Leadership is driven by values such as: valuing crew wellbeing; ensuring people are included; and ensuring that we are getting a great product while treating people well.

Servant leadership is observed and followed; This flows into the culture of the set, ensuring that people feel positive whilst making work which in turn helps the team to produce great work.



1.



The cast and crew of 'Kill Off'

# Barriers to Inclusion and Workplace Adjustments

Previously called “reasonable adjustment”, a workplace adjustment is a modification of a workplace or process, policy, procedure or situation that enables an employee with disability to perform their job in a way that minimises the impact of their disability.

Workplace adjustments allow a person to:

- Perform the standard or essential requirements of their job safely and respectfully in the workplace;
- Have equal opportunity to take part in recruitment processes, be promoted and/ or be considered for ongoing professional development;
- Experience equitable terms and conditions of employment;

• Maximise productivity of all Under the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (DDA), employers are obligated to make adjustments to accommodate an individual’s disability, unless that adjustment would result in unjustifiable hardship.

In filmmaking, what does this look like? This could be:

- Printing the script in larger font for a person with low vision;
- Moving a production meeting to a wheelchair accessible location;
- Equipment adaptation to allow a camera to be supported on a wheelchair or frame.

Each person and workplace is different, so a bespoke approach works best.



*In the lead-up to the filming of Penguin Bloom, I really wanted to open up our production team to people with disabilities who worked or wanted to work in the film industry. Through this it was such a pleasure to meet Johanna Garvin, a wonderful director who became my Director’s Attachment and spent a few weeks on set while we were shooting. Joanna fit right in and immediately became a valuable member of the team. As Penguin Bloom is a story about a woman in a wheelchair it was great to have Joanna there for guidance and opinion but more than this it was great to have another “director” on set, regardless of her disability, to bounce ideas off and take her through the process of shooting. I hope Joanna got as much out of the experience as we did. I would love to work with Bus Stop Films in the future.*

Glendyn Ivin  
Director; Penguin Bloom

There are many barriers in life that impact the inclusion of people with disability and when you place them against an industry that is very exclusive, the barriers seem to become stronger.

Many employers view adjustments as financial strain. While sometimes readjustments can cost extra, rather than view these adjustments as a cost to business, we can view them as an investment. Why? Because we know that statistically, diverse teams perform better; they enhance culture, they identify risks more efficiently; and they problem-solve better.

Furthermore, if you are making a film about disability and are making a film inclusively, you can draw on the lived experience of your crew member with disability to ensure your project is authentic.

Our view is that reasonable adjustments are an investment in the:

- Culture and wellbeing of the crew;
- Productivity of the crew;
- Ability for the team to problem solve and eliminate risks;
- Authentic portrayal of disability should the film be about disability.



## Attitudinal Barriers

How will they keep up, will they fit in, how will they manage the equipment, what if they fail? The truth is that the barrier of attitude is what actually makes a person disabled. It's not the person's mobility or physical impairment, it's how others respond to it that is the issue. If we genuinely run an "inclusive lens" over our projects and our workplaces, you will be surprised by the shift in attitude you can achieve. It's our low expectations of people with disability that often stops them from achieving – and if they fail, that's life. Isn't it better to have tried than to have never had the opportunity to give it a go? Failure is everyone's human right; it's how we build capacity and resilience.



Johanna on set of 'Remarkable Stories'

## Physical Barriers

Moving onto physical barriers, film sets can sometimes mean poor access. Studio shoots are often easier in terms of physical access, but how do you manage a location shoot which may be outside, hard to reach or unsafe for some? While not always possible, we encourage filmmakers to "ask, assess and address" before dismissing the idea of inclusive filmmaking. For example:

- Can you move the shoot to a more accessible location?
- Is there a quiet area or unit from which a person with sensory issues can work?
- Do you have wheelchair-accessible bathrooms and meal area?

## Digital Engagement

If the Corona Virus pandemic has taught us anything, it's that digital engagement for social contact and employment is now very much the "new normal". People living with disability have long campaigned for greater workplace flexibility and the

- How accessible are your offices and workplaces?
- Do you need to consider where hair and make-up is located?

Here are some great case studies where Bus Stop Films made simple but effective adjustments:

- We filmed a short film in a TV studio where the make-up area and green room were upstairs. This would not work for our students so the make-up area was set up downstairs at the side of the studio floor, which was accessible.
- A person with disability was cast to film a TVC in a studio that did not have an accessible

bathroom. The studio was in a semi-industrial area. The producers' door-knocked other businesses and identified one close by that did have accessible bathrooms for the talent to use. Not perfect, but it's an example of making it work.

- We chose a filming location at an abandoned hospital and realised that one of our filmmakers with disability couldn't walk up the stairs to set. We re-set the film downstairs and the result was actually better; the new space was cinematically more impactful than the original spot we had chosen.

capacity to use technology or work from home to get the job done. In a post Covid world, consider hosting your writer's room online using Zoom or a similar platform, host virtual casting calls or look at what roles in the production office could be undertaken

remotely. This new way of working will likely open up opportunities for people with disability who might have previously been excluded, due to lack of accessible workspace, poor public transport availability or personal care needs etc.

*Representing a relatable, authentic picture of the Australia we all live in was central to the creation of The Heights. In developing the character of Sabine, we had Emily Dash, Daniel Monks and Tim Williams in the room – representing perspectives of people living with a disability.*

*The character was created with Emily Dash in the room, prior to knowing if we'd be able to cast the role but trusting that we'd find the right person. We developed the character from there with a focus on having a three-dimensional character. Her Cerebral Palsy informed who the character was but was not the focus of the story. In Season 1, it was very much a coming of age, teenage sex story, with a character who had CP.*

*Once cast we then consulted with the actress, Bridie McKim, and went through the storylines to check that they rang true.*

**Debbie Lee**  
Director of Scripted Development; Matchbox Pictures



Ailin and Jana on set of 'Perspective Shift'

## Communication Barriers

Communication barriers can be overcome. Working with d/Deaf or hard of hearing talent and staff is not impossible. Many d/Deaf people can access interpreters through their NDIS funding.

Alternatively, if you are casting for d/Deaf or hard of hearing people, there are a number of services through which you can access interpreters directly. Refer to the Useful Links and Resources section

for more information on making your workplace d/Deaf-friendly.

You can also consider issuing scripts and call sheets in Word rather than PDF as some e-reader technology for visually impaired people cannot read PDF documents.

And the end of the day, if in doubt... just ask. Ask the person, how can I assist you, what can we do to support you? Communication is the key!

# Authentic Casting and Colour-blind Casting

Authentic Casting is the process of casting a person with a lived experience of disability in the role of the character being represented. For example, if the role is that of a wheelchair user, you would look to cast a person who actually uses a wheelchair in that role. Similarly, if the role is that of a person with an intellectual disability then the role is performed by someone who identifies as a person with intellectual disability.

Sometimes this might mean casting non-actors in roles, and this is where the director can step up to get the best out of their talent. There is nothing more disempowering for the disability community and for the advancement of inclusion than to cast an actor

without disability in a role where a person with lived experience could have performed the role. Ben Phillips, an actor who is also blind, shares his experience of authentic casting.

[Watch the video here.](#)

Some examples of authentic casting:

- [Standing Up for Sonny](#)
- [Shakespeare in Tokyo](#)
- [The Silent Child](#)

[Here is a great little clip about Authentic Casting.](#)

Colour-blind Casting (also known as Non-Traditional Casting) is where characters for a performed work (theatre, TV, film) are cast without regard to race, gender, age, etc.

This can happen when a character is created with a personality, but without a defined set of physical characteristics, such as disability, age, gender or race. This may lead to the reformations of some tropes connected to age, gender or race, and is not always directly prescribed. In some adaptations, this may lead



Gerard and Ben on set of 'Work Mate'

to women playing parts traditionally played by men (when the gender of the character is not essential) or a person of colour playing a role traditionally played by a Caucasian person. When writing a role, or even casting a role, consider enacting colour-blind casting and placing a person with disability in the spotlight. The role of

Nan, a character in American Horror Story portrayed by Jamie Brewer, was not written as a person with Down syndrome; however, the role was offered to Jamie and she brought a strong element to it that perhaps would have been missing if a person without disability was cast.



# Support Workers

A support worker is a person engaged to provide assistance to a person with disability. Some people with disability require no assistance with day to day activities, while others may require additional support. It is important to recognise that each person's support levels are different. Having a support worker in the writers' room or on set can seem cumbersome at first. However, they are there to assist the person with disability, and essentially are a piece of supportive equipment much like a cane for those with low

vision, hearing aid for the hard of hearing or a wheelchair for those needing mobility support. However, in this case, the supportive piece of equipment just happens to be a human. These workers may come to work with the person for the first few days and focus on elements such as travel training, logistics and task training, or they may be an ongoing part of the person's needs. In terms of how they fit into the team and the nuances of filmmaking, they are equally obliged to adhere to

set protocols around confidentiality, intellectual property, safety and respect. Having a support worker sign a Non-Disclosure Agreement around a project is perfectly acceptable.

Such workers generally know their clients well and are a wonderful source of encouragement and support to help the person with disability gain the most from the opportunity.

1. AJ and Chris on set of 'The Interviewer' 2. Nathan and Bek on set of 'Heartbreak & Beauty' 3. Alex and Erin on set of 'The Interviewer' 4. Libby, Sarah and Jane on set of 'The Interviewer'

# Set Protocols and Inclusive Production Quotas

What exactly can you ask a person with disability to do on a set? Essentially what you would ask of any person undertaking the role they are performing, at the level they are engaged, framed against an understanding of the capacity of the person along with their experience. If the person is attached as an entry level production assistant, tasks like getting coffee, setting up catering and helping with props are fine. If the person is engaged as a camera assistant, then requesting their assistance to set up, clean, check and pack down equipment is appropriate.

The support offered, directions given and tasks assigned should match their skill level, capacity and role engaged

– just like anyone else. Don't be afraid to support them to undertake new or more challenging tasks as a learning pathway, particularly if you see potential for their growth. With the right supports in place, allowing new staff to "act up" can be a fantastic way to unlock new skills.

We don't want to see people with disability exploited in their roles, but it would be remiss to not extend an opportunity to someone to get a foot in the door out of fear that the tasks would be too menial, or that to ask them would be disrespectful.

There is a wealth of roles on set and all are important to the overall flow of a production. There are busy times

and quieter times when your role is not needed, and that is OK. Think ahead and work out how to best support the person in the quieter times, such as while waiting for a scene to be set up.

The "tool box talk" around set protocols, roles, set safety and culture at the start of shoot should be offered to all. Respect and kindness should be leading the way, especially around behaviour and civility. Living with a disability does not absolve someone from acting with respect towards others. Open communication around expectations of behaviour should be maintained at all times.

At Bus Stop Films, we follow a rule of having students on set 90% of the time

in inclusive filmmaking. We choose 90% because sometimes people get sick, they need to leave early or they need time out, and that's all part of making workplace adjustments.

Set a goal about how inclusive you can make your set. Sometimes you might only have capacity to engage one person, or you might have capacity to engage more. Don't forget to think about all areas of production including, pre-production and post!

# Cast and Crew Communication

This is a critical component to achieving inclusion. Film sets are busy places with many people and pieces of equipment, sounds and colours. Not knowing who is who can make engaging in the process overwhelming. Where possible, we suggest making a time for the cast and crew to meet ahead of the production,

especially if you are working with a person with intellectual disability. A good idea is to include a note about bullying, respect and positive workplace culture in the call sheet, this way everyone on set receives the same message about inclusion from the director, down to the fourth assistant catering coordinator!

If this is not possible, ensure from day one that the person has a designated crew member to connect with if they have any issues or concerns. You might like to talk about how they will manage if they are feeling overwhelmed or are not across a task they have been requested to do.

On our sets, we connect each student with a mentor, this helps with the sharing of knowledge and the learning of new skills. It also helps to identify to the student who they are working with and in which department. This also offers their industry mentor a chance to get to know students more closely.



Jarryd, Topher, Henry, Rawley and Abbey on set of 'Kill Off'

# Video Resources



**Video One**  
What Is Inclusive Filmmaking?



**Video Two**  
Facilitating Inclusive Opportunities



**Video Three**  
Running an Inclusive Film Set

# Useful Links and Resources

## What is Disability

<https://www.and.org.au/pages/what-is-a-disability.html>

## Social Model of Disability

<https://pwd.org.au/resources/disability-info/social-model-of-disability>

## Occasional Paper No 39

Denise Thompson, Karen R Fisher, Christiane Purcal, Chris Deeming and Pooja Sawrikar Social Policy Research Centre, Disability Studies and Research Centre, University of New South Wales

[https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/05\\_2012/39\\_community\\_attitudes\\_to\\_disability\\_accessible.pdf](https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/05_2012/39_community_attitudes_to_disability_accessible.pdf)

## Myths about Disability

[https://www.apsc.gov.au/sites/default/files/Myths-and-stereotypes\\_web.pdf](https://www.apsc.gov.au/sites/default/files/Myths-and-stereotypes_web.pdf)

## Genevieve Clay-Smith on Inclusive Filmmaking

[https://medium.com/@Taste\\_Creative/dwhat-10-years-of-inclusive-filmmaking-has-taught-me-59f0d3bf0ece](https://medium.com/@Taste_Creative/dwhat-10-years-of-inclusive-filmmaking-has-taught-me-59f0d3bf0ece)

## Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

<https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/CRPD/Pages/ConventionRightsPersonsWithDisabilities.aspx>

## The Economic Benefits of Improving Social Inclusion: A Report Commissioned by SBS

<https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/au/Documents/Economics/deloitte-au-economics-benefits-improving-social-inclusion-270819.pdf>

## Access Advice

<https://www.australia.gov.au/accessibility>

## Being Deaf Aware – AI Media

<https://blog.ai-media.tv/blog/tips-for-being-deaf-aware>

## Making your Workplace Deaf Friendly

<https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/conditionsandtreatments/hearing-loss-communication-in-the-workplace>

## Interpreting Services

<https://sweeeyinterpreting.com.au>

<http://www.auslanstageleft.com.au>

## TIFF Talks – Authentic Casting: The Real World on Screen

<https://filmmakerfreedom.com/blog/filmmaking-authenticity-casting-non-actors>

## Workplace Adjustments

<https://www.and.org.au/pages/workplace-adjustments.html>

## Different Types of Disability

<https://www.forgov.qld.gov.au/understand-disability>

## Kyja Kristjansson-Nelson, Professor of Film

[The Theory of Dispositions in Filmmaking and Leadership](#)



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**Lead Contributor**

Genevieve Clay-Smith

**Contributors**

Henry Smith	Johanna Garvin
Vivian Mullan	Sofya Gollan
Dianna La Grassa	Gerard O'Dwyer
Paul Nunnari	Monica Power
Matt Carroll	Joni Campbell
Ben Phillips	

**Project Manager**

Tracey Corbin-Matchett

**Video Production**

Julian Nehaus