# Access and Inclusion: Paris 2024 and the runway to Brisbane 2032 - Member Forum

*Wednesday 4th December*

## About Queenslanders with Disability Network (QDN)

Queenslanders with Disability Network (QDN) is an organisation of, for, and with people with disability. QDN operates a state-wide network of 2,500+ members and supporters who provide information, feedback and views based on their lived experience, which inform the organisation’s systemic advocacy activities. We believe people with disability should always be at the table when decisions are made that directly impact their lives.

## Leaving a lasting legacy

The 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games were held earlier this year in Paris, France. The Games were the biggest event ever organised in the country and for 19 days the world’s focus was on France. The world’s largest sporting event takes over a city and creates a powerful platform for inclusivity, accessibility and positive change like no other.

With Brisbane 2032 approaching, and planning underway, there is a once in a lifetime opportunity to deliver an inclusive and accessible Games and create a lasting legacy for Queenslanders with disability, and to ensure that Queenslanders with disability play a direct role in shaping the legacy of the Games through the structures and governance that plan and deliver the Games.

The Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games present an opportunity to close the employment gap and create meaningful career pathways for people with disability. Game Changers, a report launched by QDN and Urbis on 3 June 2024, aims to create employment opportunities for people with disability in Queensland. It offers a comprehensive analysis of the current employment landscape for people with disability and provides strategic recommendations to shape and enhance the employment ecosystem leading up to, during, and following the 2032 Games.

You can read the Game Changers report here: <https://qdn.org.au/our-work/game-changers-report/>

# Introduction

On Wednesday 4 December 2024, QDN hosted an online member forum, *Access and Inclusion: Paris 2024 and the runway to Brisbane 2032.* This was an opportunity to discuss learnings from Paris 2024, and how can we use these learnings to shape an inclusive and accessible Brisbane 2032 and beyond.

The forum was facilitated by QDN Chairperson Dr Sharon Boyce and acting QDN CEO Steve Coulter, with three guest panellists, Julie Saunders, Director of Urbis, Josh Bavas, a reporter with 9 News Queensland, and Rachel Watson, a three-time Paralympian. During the forum, attendees were able to submit their questions to the guest panellists who responded during the Q&A portion of the event.

Over 100 people registered to attend the event, with 43 in attendance. The forum was recorded, and the video has been posted to QDN’s YouTube Channel. You can watch the video here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xAYMd5ah5EI>

This summary report covers the key points raised by the guest panellists during the forum and the Q&A portion of the event.

# Summary of Speaker Points

## **Julie Saunders, Director of Urbis**

### **Key points:**

1. The Games Changers report defines the challenge that the Games present.
2. There is an opportunity to develop an inclusive employment legacy from the Brisbane 2032 Olympics and Paralympic Games.
3. There is a once in a lifetime opportunity for Queensland to showcase accessibility on the world stage and leave a lasting legacy of inclusion.
4. An inclusive Games legacy must be a catalyst for meaningful and sustained employment.

### **Recommendations:**

1. By 2028, foundations are prepared and tested to improve employment outcomes for people with disability during the Games.
2. By 2032, the Brisbane Olympics and Paralympic Games have set and achieved clear and measurable targets for disability employment, procurement and volunteering.
3. By 2042, people with disability have more opportunities and meaningful employment within a connected and supportive employment ecosystem.

## **Josh Bavas, reporter with 9 News Queensland**

### **Reflections:**

1. Josh reported from the Paris 2024 games and stated that the organisers did a great job. It felt like the organisers wanted to make Paris an accessible Games and worked very hard towards this goal.
2. We encountered difficulty navigating our gear on trolleys and needed ramps however there were not always ramps available.
3. Paris has very complex and multilayered roads, rails and footpaths. It isn’t always easy to find your way around.
4. Some temporary footways were made from gravel which was not easily accessible.
5. Location of ramps or lifts was not always known to staff and volunteers. At times the accessible route to locations was unclear.
6. Participants attending could order a shuttle to take them to a venue if they needed, which did require 48 hours’ notice.
7. Audio description services were offered to many events, but you had to register in advance for that service.
8. Some stakeholders held a forum three months after the Games to report about what they learnt.
9. Paris was trying to retrofit accessibility into old infrastructure, and that is sometimes difficult.
10. Paris had Accessibility Ambassadors, who met with shopkeepers and service providers leading up to the Games to discuss how they could improve their store spaces and other innovations.
11. Attendees could use maps that detailed a list of cultural sites that were accessible.
12. Shade covering of areas was removed so that organisers could get top-down view for security purposes, this led to some attendees overheating and needing medical care.
13. An audio assistant app was rolled out to provide information inside venues to help people navigate and describe what was going on.

### **Recommendations:**

1. City planners need to take into account the physical elements of the city to make the Games accessible.
2. Technology including apps and websites can help people plan their journey and day.
3. Accessibility Ambassadors could go into the community before, and during the Games to raise awareness.

## **Rachel Watson, Paralympian**

### **Reflections:**

1. It’s important we make a great and long-term legacy for the Games. Employment for people with disability is important and we must fully utilise the skillset of people with disability.
2. The buses in Paris were hot, with no air-conditioners. Competitors had to get there early and then cool down before events. Air-conditioners on buses should be mandatory.
3. Planning decisions should be road-tested – for example, we never seem to put enough lifts into buildings.
4. In Paris, there were sometimes not enough accessible bathrooms, and they were usually always locked or being used. There was always a queue for the accessible bathrooms.
5. We need to make sure spectators can get in, get to their seat, and to the bathroom quickly and easily. Otherwise, people might only remember the negatives about the Games.
6. I really want attendees to have a great time and look back and say “wow, this is what it’s like to be in Australia”.

## Summary of the Q&A

## **Rachel Watson**

**Question:** What were the facilities like in Paris 2024, and how can we make things better for Brisbane 2032?

**Answer:** Even though lots of people have great ideas about accessibility for the Games,in some ways, we are bound by the rules and legislation set by the Olympic and Paralympic Organising Committee. Ideally, we don’t want to be lifted into the pool, it would be great to have a hoist to take Paralympians to the pool, but I don’t see this happening as the organisers have to be convinced, which could take many years. It might be difficult to install hoists in old venues, and would potentially be very expensive. Perhaps we could come together and write a proposal for 2032.

Having hoists would make things a lot more dignified, simpler and would be a good change to future events. It’s not just about what is easiest, it’s about giving people with disability their dignity back. During the Games, there are cameras everywhere, sometimes they do film footage that is compromising, which becomes a laughing point rather than a learning point. I think we need to change how we do this.

There are so many great things that could come from Brisbane 2032, including supporting Paralympians to participate, supporting people with disability to spectate at events, and supporting people with disability who work at the venues.

**Question:** What was the experience and learnings of the ticketing and accessibility of this system we can take from Paris?

**Answer:** Tickets were very hard to get - I do know people that tried to get tickets to watch my event, and they weren’t able to. In Brisbane you often can’t buy tickets online to an event, you have to phone the venue to book accessible tickets which can sometimes take hours, or you have to wait to be called back. It would be great for Brisbane 2032 to create a ticketing system where all people can book tickets online regardless of their access needs, where people can book a ticket online and enter their access requirements. In Paris, some people had to buy an accommodation package in order to get a ticket to an event. This was a lot more expensive and a lot of people couldn’t afford it. Additionally, if you buy a ticket, there is no guarantee that you will get a ticket to the specific event you want to see. My family wanted to watch me, but then they were not allocated a ticket on my race day and couldn’t watch me. It would be great to do things differently for Brisbane 2032.

**Question:** What is the major opportunity that Paris missed with these Games?

**Answer:** The opportunity to do more promotion and media engagement with people with disability, especially those who might be less known. After a Paralympic Games, there is an increase of people with disability wanting to get engaged in sport and opportunities. However, without media representation of people with disability, if they don’t see someone like them represented, that moment is lost. We need to make sure that every disability profile is represented and given a voice. We have an opportunity to make sure people with disability are represented across the Olympics, and people feel inspired, not disheartened.

**Question:** Did you see any examples of where the private sector played a role in building or highlighting inclusivity or accessibility during the Games?

**Answer:** Unfortunately, I wasn’t paying a lot of attention to that space as I was very focused on competing.

**Question:** Did you get a sense of a change or improvement in the attitude of the general publictowards people with disability in Paris and France?

**Answer:** The volunteers were incredible and so happy to be there which in turn made the public happy to be there. When they spread the joy around, it calmed people down and made them happy. It made people appreciative of the fact they were there, especially after Tokyo and COVID-19. Everyone was really pleased to be there and enjoy the Games. It shows how good events like this are for people.

**Question:** What strategies during your research have proven effective in creating meaningful and long-lasting employment opportunities?

**Answer:** If we know there are people with disability interested in sport and looking for an employment pathway, we should be getting them involved in small scale events now so they can get some experience and to show employers what is possible.

## **Julie Watson**

**Question:** How can we make sure that the standards used in building accessible housing for Paralympians translate into better housing standards and solutions in Australia going forward?

**Answer:** There has been recent work done around the universal access provisions under the building code. Unfortunately, some of these standards are optional in Australia. In Queensland these standards are a requirement, despite industry push back around the additional cost. The village provides the opportunity to demonstrate exemplar in this space and the design brief for the village should not just be for able-bodied Olympians but for Paralympians who might require modifications. I hope the brief includes requirements around universal access which can lead to better models and a benchmark across the broader market.

**Question:** What strategies during your research have proven effective in creating meaningful and long-lasting employment opportunities?

**Answer:** There was great intent, willingness and purpose however most of those events aren’t producing systemic change or altering business practices to have long-term inclusion. The London Games had a 50% target for participation of people with disability in the media space and there was an increase of employment of people with disability of 3% to 4% during and directly after the Games, which then diminished as they were only short-term opportunities.

We need to mandate some elements to help businesses transform to embed better approaches and better approaches to inclusion. Implementing a system like this takes time and support and needs significant investment and cultural change. A lot of business owners want to go about it but are fearful, concerned about the impact on their business, or are unsure how to go about it.

Having a person with disability in a leadership position is a great way to implement processes and initiatives successfully, however, it is about how the programs are delivered in the organisation which requires education among all employees and employers.

I think there is an opportunity around sport, it can play a key role from an employment and participation side to help shift the dial. Government, sport, and education are the three sectors I think could be champions in this space.

## **Josh Bavas**

**Question:** What is the major opportunity that Paris missed with these Games?

**Answer:** Road testing – the will was there, and all the politicians and officials in Paris wanted to boast about how inclusive the Games were but on the ground it didn’t work, despite all the people who did want it to work. If there had been more road testing it could have smoothed out some wrinkles.

The other missed opportunity was the retrofitting of a city that is hundreds of years old, which comes with lots of issues and can take a lot of time. In Brisbane John Sharp who runs Riverlife is putting together a proposal to start the first wheelchair accessible Brisbane Story Bridge climb. If we can do this in Brisbane, why couldn’t they do this in Paris?

**Question:** Did you see any examples of where the private sector played a role in building or highlighting inclusivity or accessibility during the Games?

**Answer:** I didn't see any myself, but I know that there were sponsors who were in that space. Art galleries and other event spaces promoted the Games and often used the Paralympic logo and the mascot.

**Question:** What do you think media representation of people with disability might look like in an Australian setting ahead of Brisbane 2032?

**Answer:** In the Australian media landscape there are some organisations that do better than others at representing people with disability. The ABC has come leaps and bounds in that space and prides themselves on hiring journalists from all different backgrounds, including people with disability. The insight they have to tell stories from their own perspectives to a wide audience, puts the ABC at an advantage and encourages a more inclusive media landscape. I would like to see more media organisations moving in that direction and putting more focus on accessibility, including the Olympic and Paralympic Games, which does attract significant media attention and political leadership. I encourage you all to put forward your stories and ideas to journalists, sometimes if there isn’t a groundswell, the media can overlook these really important issues.

**Question:** Did you get a sense of a change or improvement in the attitude of the general publictowards people with disability in Paris and France?

**Answer:** There was an overwhelming sense that everyone was proud to put on a Games that was supposed to be inclusive. Volunteers did as much as they could to assist spectators and there were some aids on hand to help people who had daily requirements. The practicalities did however have some short falls. Generally, people had good attitudes and people on the street would help if they needed to so everyone could enjoy the event.

## What next?

By considering the learnings from previous Olympic and Paralympic Games, we can ensure we deliver a Brisbane 2032 Games that the entire community enjoys and that leaves a lasting and positive legacy.The 2032 Olympics and Paralympics are an opportunity to showcase Australia’s commitment to inclusive employment and showcase the Paralympic spirit of inclusion in a real and tangible way by providing long-lasting, fulfilling employment opportunities for people with disability.

There is an opportunity to set the benchmark for accessible and inclusive infrastructure for all future Queensland developments. Previous developments have shown that the entire community benefit from and enjoys more accessible infrastructure. Parents with prams, seniors experiencing mobility issues, and children still prone to trips and falls are among the many to express that they like the comfort and ease of truly inclusive infrastructure.

The Games Independent Infrastructure and Coordination Authority have made a public call for submissions for a 100 Day Review of the Games. The best time to incorporate inclusivity and accessibility into infrastructure and employment is at the earliest stages of a project.We encourage everyone to have their say and take the time to make a submission. The games will provide a lasting legacy, and by putting in the effort to express what you want, you can contribute to making that legacy remarkable and positive.

**Submissions close Friday 10 January and can be made through this link:** [**https://www.gamesreview.com.au/landing/3221207e-c48e-4330-afdb-91e07e484924/**](https://www.gamesreview.com.au/landing/3221207e-c48e-4330-afdb-91e07e484924/)