Queensland Disability Conference 2026

Toowoomba

Access All Areas: The Road Ahead

Program

The Annex

QDN
QUEENSLANDERS WITH DISABILITY NETWORK
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Acknowledgement of Country

We respectfully acknowledge the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the land on which this event is taking place. We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging.

Introduction

Welcome to the Toowoomba Regional Disability Conference 2026, proudly hosted by Queenslanders with Disability Network (QDN) and the Department of Families, Seniors, Disability Services and Child Safety (DFSDSCS). We are delighted to have you join us for this event, with regional conferences now in the second year and the first time this has been held in Toowoomba.

The 2026 Regional Conference theme is **Access All Areas: The Road Ahead** and focuses on turning reform, inclusion and opportunity into meaningful action for Queenslanders with disability. The conference brings together leaders from government, business and community sectors, and people with disability and advocates.

This year's focus is on systems and disability reforms, the social and economic impact and opportunity of the Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games on regional Queensland and our focus on accessible and inclusive transport.

Advancing disability reforms are central to building a more equitable Queensland and ensuring people with disability, their families and carers are active partners in shaping the systems and services that affect their lives.

The Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games will transform Queensland's communities, driving lasting social and economic opportunity for people with disability, redesigning our places, spaces, and systems to be truly inclusive.

Accessible and inclusive transport underpins this vision, enabling Queenslanders with disability to travel confidently and independently across the state – now and well beyond 2032. The conference elevates lived experience and cross-sector leadership, structured around four key panels:

1. **Rights, Safety and Systems Reforms** – how systems move beyond policy and institutional reform to changes that people with disability can see and experience in their everyday lives.
2. **Disability Reforms** – unpacking the national and state reform agendas shaping the NDIS and Queensland's disability system, and how implementation can be co-designed and effective.
3. **Brisbane 2032 Games – Social and Economic Inclusion Legacy for Regional Queensland** – exploring how the Games and other major events can deliver economic opportunity, accessible tourism and genuine community benefit for regional communities. Not only what infrastructure is delivered, but whether people have greater opportunity to participate in sport, employment, community life and the economic opportunities generated by the Games.
4. **Accessible and Inclusive Transport** – examining opportunities of how the lead-up to Brisbane 2032 can be used to accelerate accessibility and improve the whole transport journey for residents and visitors, while ensuring improvements create an enduring benefit for the region now and beyond 2032.

Everyone has a part to play in bringing disability reforms to life. This work continues to be guided by the Queensland's disability reform work, Queensland's Disability Plan 2022–27: Together, a better Queensland and Australia's Disability Strategy 2021-2031.

Throughout the day, QDN members will be leading as MCs, speakers, panelists and peer hosts, highlighting the talents, skills, and leadership of people with disability. QDN and DFSDSCS encourage you to engage in meaningful conversations, build connections, and share your ideas and energy to work together to deliver ‘Access All Areas’.

We extend our thanks to all speakers and facilitators for their contribution. We also acknowledge the presence and leadership of people with disability in shaping this conference and in driving systemic change across Queensland.

We hope you find the conference enriching and leave inspired to continue the vital work of fostering an inclusive Queensland.

Event Overview

People with lived experience of disability and other leaders across government, community, and business are invited to contribute to how we work together and the role we each play our part in advancing reform opportunities ahead, driving accessible and inclusive transport and embedding inclusive practices across all sectors to improve the lives of people with disability, and shape a more equitable Queensland.

There is one keynote speaker and four panel sessions that highlight key areas for driving accessible practices in regional Queensland now and into the future, including the 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games. Panel sessions will be facilitated by people with disability. Together, these sessions are designed to turn reform, innovation and lived experience into practical, meaningful action – reflecting this year’s conference theme, **Access All Areas: The Road Ahead**.

Conference History

This is the second annual Regional Disability Conference series and its first for the Toowoomba region. The conference is delivered by QDN in partnership with DFSDSCS to bring together people with disability, government, business, community organisations and researchers to shape disability policy, inclusion and reform across Queensland.

Each conference is designed to explore emerging opportunities, examine progress and identify the leadership needed to deliver meaningful change.

2023 – Australia's Disability Strategy Forum

Queensland was the first state or territory in Australia to convene a jurisdictional forum for Australia's Disability Strategy, bringing 261 people together with 13 Queensland Government departments, six statutory bodies and four local councils in the room. The Voice of Queenslanders with Disability Report was launched at the event. The report set a baseline for measuring progress and named four strategies for action which included safeguarding community voice, improving standard of living, enhancing dignity and equity, and strengthening belonging.

2024 – Imagining Possibilities: Shaping an inclusive Queensland

Building on the momentum of 2023, the inaugural Queensland Disability Conference was attended by 192 people in-person and 125 people online. There were four keynote speakers and four panels discussing disability reform, First Nations inclusion, the Brisbane 2032 opportunity and research to shape an inclusive Queensland. The strength of engagement, the calibre and diversity of speakers, the quality of table conversations, and the fully accessible format (Auslan, captioning, graphic recording) set the benchmark for future events.

2025 – Unlocking Potential: Reforms, Innovation and Inclusion

The conference expanded beyond Brisbane to include dedicated regional events in Cairns and Rockhampton. The Innovation Hub was a structured pitch process that turned table conversations into concrete sets of locally-driven ideas which included employment pathways, co-designed local disability plans, and Brisbane 2032 legacy infrastructure. This provided a set of tangible actions, rather than just a record of discussions.

2026 – Access All Areas: The Road Ahead

This year continues to deliver the state conference with a regional footprint in both Cairns and Toowoomba. The focus shifts to implementation of disability reforms, social and economic impacts for Brisbane 2032, and accessible transport. As with every conference in the series, panels are facilitated by people with disability, continuing QDN's consistent approach to embedding lived experience leadership into the structure of the conferences, and not just it's content.

Conference Agenda

Thursday 5 November 2026	
Time	**Activity**
9:30am	**Conference Welcome:** Marie Bledsoe and Karin Brady
9:35am	**Acknowledgement of Country**
9:40am	**Conference Opening Address**
9:50am	**Speaker: Access to Rights: The Road Ahead** Debbie Platz APM – Queensland Human Rights Commissioner
10:15am	**Panel 1: The Road Ahead: Rights, Safety and Systems Reforms** • Kate Connors – Victims' Commissioner for Queensland • Matilda Alexander – Chief Executive Officer, Queensland Advocacy for Inclusion • Samay Zhouand – Public Trustee of Queensland and Chief Executive Officer at the Queensland Public Trustee **Facilitator:** Nigel Webb – Board Director, QDN
11:00am	Morning tea
11:30am	**Panel 2: The Road Ahead: Disability Reforms** • Desmond Lee – State Manager, Queensland, National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) • Dr Sharon Boyce – Co-Chair, Queensland Disability Advisory Council (QDAC) • Sharon White – Director, Strategic Policy (Disability), Department of Families, Seniors, Disability Services and Child Safety. **Facilitator:** Michelle Moss – Chief Executive Officer, QDN
12:30pm	Lunch
1:15pm	**Panel 3: Brisbane 2032 Games – Social and Economic Inclusion Legacy for Regional Queensland** • Mayor Geoff McDonald – Toowoomba Regional Council • Erin Hatton – Head of Impact for Brisbane Organising Committee, 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games • Katie Kelly OAM PLY – Accessibility and Inclusion Manager, Olympic and Paralympic Games Office, Department of Sport, Racing and Olympic and Paralympic Games • Adam and Susy Wenitong – Adapt Mentor **Facilitator:** Dr Sharon Boyce – Co-Chair, Queensland Disability Advisory Council (QDAC)

Thursday 5 November 2026	
Time	**Activity**
2:30pm	**Panel 4: Accessible and Inclusive Transport** • Tom Jesshope – Senior Regional Manager, Black & White Cabs with Graeme Nystrom – Taxi Driver, Toowoomba • Daniel Quan – Associate Director, Transport Planning, Urbis • Nigel Webb – User Journey Consultant, Games Readiness Report **Facilitator:** Laura Scurr – Peer Leader
3:15pm	**Thanks and close:** Michelle Moss – CEO, QDN
3:30pm	**Networking event**
4:30pm	Finish

Conference Presenters

Masters of Ceremonies



Image description: A woman with dark hair (pulled back) and black framed glasses, she is wearing a black jacket over a navy shirt. She is also wearing pearl earrings.

Marie Bledsoe

Marie Bledsoe is a passionate lived-experience advocate, inclusion consultant and founder of Humanista, bringing together her love of people, connection and meaningful change. With over 20 years' experience across government, corporate and community sectors. Marie holds an MBA and is a member of the Australian Institute of Company Directors. Her advocacy is informed by her experiences of disability, neurodivergence, chronic health conditions and mental health.

Her work includes contributions to Queenslanders with Disability Network, Women with Disabilities Australia and major mental health reforms, including the Shifting Minds Strategy and Queensland Trauma Strategy. A self-confessed lover of myth-busting, challenging assumptions and turning expectations on their head, Marie believes people with disability deserve more than a seat at the table; they deserve a genuine voice in shaping what happens around it.

Known for her warmth, authenticity and willingness to spark meaningful conversations, Marie is passionate about creating spaces where everyone feels welcomed, valued and empowered to contribute.



Image description: A woman sitting in a chair wearing a purple long sleeve shirt. They have a necklace made of silver circles and a rainbow badge and bracelet.

Karin Brady

Karin Brady is a Toowoomba-based disability advocate who has spent more than 30 years working across disability, housing, human rights and social policy. She has a long involvement with Queenslanders with Disability Network (QDN) as a founding member and is currently Convenor of QDN's Women's Peer Support Group, Co-convenor of the LGBTQIA+ Peer Support Group, and has recently been appointed Co-convenor of QDN's Statewide Online Peer Support Group. Karin is also a current QDN Peer Mentor.

Housing has been a big part of Karin's work. She currently chairs Queensland's Expert Disability Housing Advisory Panel and has previously coordinated the Queensland Disability Housing Coalition.

Karin is a past President of Women With Disabilities Australia (WWDA) and has represented women with disability internationally, including at the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women in New York, human rights training in Indonesia and an international conference in South Korea.

Karin brings lived experience and many years of advocacy to her work, with a strong focus on making sure people with disability are heard and included.

Speakers



Image description: A woman with blonde hair sitting at a desk. She is wearing a blue dress with white spots.

Debbie Platz APM

Debbie Platz commenced as the Queensland Human Rights Commissioner on 30 January 2026. She is the second Commissioner to be appointed to this role in Queensland.

Debbie has extensive public sector leadership experience, including as the New South Wales State Emergency Service (SES), Deputy Commissioner Operations, where she was responsible for safeguarding communities from natural disasters and demonstrated a deep commitment to representing vulnerable people.

Her career includes significant roles in the Australian Federal Police (AFP) as Assistant Commissioner and the Queensland Police Service as Assistant Commissioner.

She has been recognised for her ethical and diligent service, which includes being awarded an Australian Police Medal and Queensland Police Service medal, along with a meritorious service medal.

Debbie holds a Master of Studies (Applied Criminology) from the University of Cambridge, United Kingdom; Master of Business Administration from the University of the Sunshine Coast; Graduate Diploma in Education (Secondary/VET) from the University of the Sunshine Coast; and is Adjunct Professor with the University of Queensland.

Panellists



Image description: A woman with long blonde hair wearing a knitted top.

Kate Connors

Kate is committed to ensuring the experiences of victims and survivors inform government decision-making. Drawing on her strong background across justice and human services, she understands how policy is developed, how systems operate and where opportunities for reform exist.

Through engagement with victims, survivors, frontline workers and stakeholders, Kate, supported by an experienced team, identifies systemic barriers and emerging issues affecting people's experiences of the justice system and related services. She uses these insights to provide evidence-based advice to government and drive improvements for victims of crime in Queensland.

Kate recognises that systemic issues often arise when structures and processes work against the best efforts of the people within them. By identifying recurring themes across victim-survivor experiences, she helps shape practical reforms that improve system responses and outcomes for victims and survivors.



Image description: A woman with short blonde hair smiling at the camera, she is wearing a black top.

Matilda Alexander

Matilda Alexander is the Chief Executive Officer of Queensland Advocacy for Inclusion and a human rights lawyer with more than 25 years' experience in advocacy, legal services and systems reform. Throughout her career she has worked with Prisoners' Legal Service, the LGBTI Legal Service, the Queensland Human Rights Commission and Legal Aid Queensland, and has taught at Griffith University.



Image description: A man with very short hair wearing a grey jacket over a white business shirt.

Samay Zhouand

Samay Zhouand is the Public Trustee of Queensland and Chief Executive Officer of the Queensland Public Trustee (QPT). With more than 20 years' experience in senior legal and executive roles across the Queensland Government, he is recognised for advancing integrity, accountability and reform in complex service systems. Since joining the QPT, Samay has led a strong focus on customer advocacy, supported decision-making and financial independence, helping vulnerable Queenslanders exercise greater choice, voice and autonomy. His work reflects a deep commitment to safeguarding rights, strengthening protections, and building services that better support people at risk of harm, abuse and exploitation.



Image description: A man with grey hair and glasses, wearing a white shirt. He is smiling at the camera.

Desmond Lee

Born and raised in Cairns, Desmond Lee has worked in senior executive roles within the disability services sector in Queensland for over 16 years. His passion for working with people with disability was first sparked while at high school, where he regularly volunteered his time to work with children with disability at the (then) Cairns Central Special School.

Desmond has devoted 29 years to working in senior roles within the human services sector across Queensland, specialising in disability and community services, housing and Indigenous affairs across North Queensland, Cape York, Torres Strait and Gulf regions. Des has played a key role in implementing social reforms in First Nations communities in remote Cape York and Torres Strait communities. Des has led the strategic and operational delivery of NDIS services for Queensland for some 10 years. Starting with the roll out of the first NDIS transition sites in Townsville, Palm Island and Charters Towers in 2016. Des would go on to establish and lead the Queensland (NDIS) Service Delivery Division as the NDIS was finally fully established in Queensland in 2019.

Des currently serves as the General Manager for the Queensland (NDIS) Service Delivery Team, servicing and supporting some 165,000 participants across metro, regional, rural and remote Queensland. A role which he has enjoyed for the past three and a half years.



Image description: A woman with long light brown hair (Pulled back). She's wearing a black jacket over a black top and has clear glasses and small gold earrings and a necklace.

Sharon White

Sharon White is Director, Strategic Policy (Disability) with the Department of Families, Seniors, Disability Services and Child Safety. With almost 20 years of public sector experience, she has led significant disability policy, legislative and reform initiatives, including implementation of Australia's Disability Strategy, Queensland's response to the Disability Royal Commission, and major NDIS policy and legislative reforms. Sharon has extensive expertise in strategic policy development, intergovernmental relations, stakeholder engagement and leading complex cross-government projects.



Image description: A woman with short blonde curly hair, wearing a black and white top and a gold necklace. She has a headrest and is smiling at the camera.

Dr Sharon Boyce

Dr Sharon Boyce is an educator, author, speaker and disability advocate, focused on disability awareness across Queensland and Australia. She is passionate and committed to social justice – empowering people with disability and supporting real living independence. In addition to her role as QDN Deputy Chairperson, Sharon is the Co-Chair of the Queensland Disability Advisory Council (Queensland Government) and Advisor to the Queensland Minister for Seniors, Disability Services and Child Safety.

She is an appointed member of the National Disability Insurance Scheme Independent Advisory Council, a member of the Physical Disability Australia Board, and advisor to the Toowoomba Regional Council's Access Committee. She is the Director of the Australian Institute of Inclusive Education and Research, CEO of the Disability Training Institute and Chief Executive Officer and Director of Aus Inclusion Pty Ltd. In 2020 she was awarded a Doctor of Letters for her research in education inclusion and dyslexia, and she is currently completing a Doctor of Philosophy.

Among the awards she has received are the Queensland Regional Achiever Award in 2012 for her work in awareness, raising and creating inclusive communities across Australia, a Human Rights Award in 2008 for her contribution to creating inclusion across the community, and a Disability Action Week Award in 2003 for her work writing an accessible children's story book.



Image description: A man with short brown hair and black rimmed glasses. He's wearing a dark jacket over a white business shirt with small squares; he is also wearing a black tie with green and white stripes.

Mayor Geoff McDonald

Born and raised in Toowoomba, Geoff is a fifth-generation business owner along with his wife Lisa and parents John (Cracker) and Joan McDonald. Their company Cracker Print and Paper has a trading history dating back to 1901. Geoff's dedication to his pre-press trade was recognised with being awarded the Queensland Printing and Graphic Arts Apprentice of the Year in 1992.

Geoff has a long history of community involvement as a patron, ambassador, board member and life member of a number of community, business, sporting and charitable organisations. Geoff is a person with strong commitment, enthusiasm and energy to continually improve the lifestyle, economy and global standing of the Toowoomba Region. Geoff was appointed as Deputy Mayor of Toowoomba Regional Council on 23 April 2020. Geoff was appointed Mayor of Toowoomba Regional Council on 21 July 2023.



Image description: A woman with short blonde hair wearing a lilac button-up shirt and grey pants. She has her arms folded.

Erin Hatton

Erin serves as Head of Impact for Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games, guiding the Social Impact portfolio. With more than 25 years' experience throughout Australia, the Pacific and Africa, she has built a career at the intersection of sport, social development and diplomacy. Erin is a skilled facilitator, relationship builder and program designer known for her authenticity, collaborative approach, and cross cultural fluency. She is fuelled by a desire to create meaningful, lasting impact in people's lives.



Image description: A woman with long blonde hair sitting on a couch with a plant in the background. She is wearing a dark green dress and smiling at the camera.

Katie Kelly OAM PLY

Katie Kelly OAM PLY is the Accessibility and Inclusion Manager in the Olympic and Paralympic Games Office, Department of Sport, Racing, Olympic and Paralympic Games. Her role is focussed on advancing accessibility and empowering people with disability through the Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games and beyond. Katie is a two-time Paralympian who was the first Australian to win a gold medal in the sport of Paratriathlon with her Guide Michellie Jones AM at the Rio 2016 Paralympic Games, and a two-time World Champion (Chicago 2015, Rotterdam 2017). She retired after seven years in high-performance sport with her final race being at the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games where she finished 5th.

Prior to her elite sporting career, Katie worked for leading sporting organisations and major events in senior marketing services roles including at NRL, Melbourne Storm Rugby League Football Club, Tabcorp and NT Government. She has also served on a number of Boards including Achieve Australia and Deaf Sports Australia. Katie identifies as a person with disability, and shares the experiences of disability in the workplace, and the nuances of disablism she has observed over her career both in sports as an athlete and her professional corporate career. She also founded in 2017, and is a Director of a registered Australian charity, Sport Access Foundation, which provides sporting grants for young Australians with disability to access sport.



Image description: A man and a woman, man is wearing a brown overcoat over a black shirt, he has very short hair. The woman is wearing a black jacket buttoned up over a green shirt. She has short, dark hair. They are standing in front of an indigenous painting.

Adam and Susy Wenitong

Adapt Mentorship Indigenous Corporation is a Toowoomba-based Indigenous-led social enterprise creating pathways for young people through mentoring, culture, sport, education and employment.

Through programs like StreetFooty, they engage young people who may not otherwise have the opportunity or support to participate in sport, using that connection to open pathways into training, employment, culture and community.

Their focus is simple: opportunity only creates impact when young people can actually access it. As Brisbane 2032 approaches, they are focused on creating a legacy that reaches beyond the Games and into the lives of young people and regional communities.

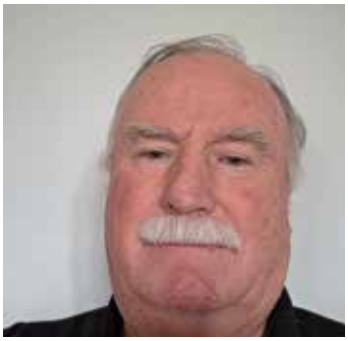

Image description: A man with thin grey hair and a grey moustache wearing a black and red polo shirt.

Graeme Nystrom

Graeme Nystrom is a local Toowoomba Taxi Driver. Graeme worked for 25 years in the grain industry involved in handling storage and marketing throughout Qld and NSW. Looking for independence and to have more time with his family, he purchased his first taxi licence in 1996. Over the past 30 years he has built his fleet up to 8 taxi licences which included 6 wheelchair accessible vehicles and 2 sedans.



Image description: A man smiling with short black hair wearing a black long-sleeved shirt.

Daniel Quan

Dan Quan is an Associate Director at Urbis with over 14 years of experience across Australia and the UK in transport planning, parking and kerbside strategy, and sustainable mobility. His work focuses on creating transport networks and public spaces that are more accessible, inclusive and responsive to community needs.

He has worked with government and private sector clients on projects spanning accessible streets, movement and place planning, parking policy, active transport and travel behaviour change. Prior to returning to Australia, he delivered a range of transport and kerbside projects in London, including parking permit strategies and corridor studies designed to balance accessibility, safety and competing street demands.

Dan is passionate about improving how people move through cities and communities, with a particular interest in designing transport systems that support equitable access and participation for all users.



Image description: A man wearing a QDN polo shirt, leaning on a headrest.

Nigel Webb

Nigel has more than 20 years' experience as a social justice advocate and professional. He is a trusted voice, advisor and leader across the community services industry, business and government. His extensive knowledge and experience guides state and national advisory and representatives' groups, boards and community organisations. He provides strategic advice and direction on social and economic inclusion of people with disabilities, and a range of issues of strategic importance to the disability and carer sectors around the NDIS and reforms to employment. Nigel is currently a member of the QDN Board of Directors, Queensland Government Expert Disability Housing Advisory Panel, Queensland Disability Reform Implementation Stakeholder Committee and a representative on the NDIS Review Advisory Committee Queensland. He is a convenor of the Human Research and Ethics Committee at Logic Institute Ltd and a client liaison officer with Choice, Passion, Life.



Image description: A man with short dark hair and a moustache and beard. He is wearing a black shirt.

Tom Jesshope

Tom Jesshope is Senior Regional Manager with Black & White Cabs, based in Toowoomba. In this role, Tom oversees regional operations across Queensland, with a focus on service delivery, fleet and driver engagement, and initiatives that create more reliable and accessible transport. Tom is also involved in the growth of Care Transport Services supporting NDIS participants, aged care customers and other clients who may require an additional level of compliance from their service provider.

Facilitators



Image description: A woman with short blonde hair, wearing a blue shirt and smiling at the camera with her arms folded.

Michelle Moss

Michelle Moss is QDN's Chief Executive Officer and has spent more than 30 years working across the human services sector, including disability, health, and women's services such as sexual assault and domestic and family violence support. Her career spans direct support work, counselling, behaviour support, consumer and community engagement, and social policy. Michelle is a strong advocate for the voice of people with disability, championing their role in driving and influencing public policy and in the planning, design, delivery and evaluation of services. She has particular expertise in the advocacy areas of transport, housing and health and their impact on Queenslanders with disability.



Image description: A woman with short dark hair and wearing a pink diamond shirt. She is also wearing a colourful jacket with flowers on it. She has a garden behind her.

Laura Scurr

Laura Scurr was born with athetoid cerebral palsy. She holds a Graduate Certificate in Business, a Bachelor of Commerce and a Bachelor of Business (Accounting & Management) from the University of Southern Queensland, a Cert IV in Training and Assessment and several other certificate level qualifications. She owns a consultancy and workshops business in Toowoomba and is also studying a Bachelor of Nutrition.

Laura is passionate about raising awareness that people with disability can, and do, have employment and are able to contribute as valuable members of society. Laura is heavily involved in her community, serving on the Queensland Disability Advisory Council (QDAC), the Disability Reform Implementation Stakeholder Committee (DRISC) and is a current, non-executive Director of Ability Enterprises. She is focused on employment prospects for people with disability, and has been involved with and spoken at numerous local, state and national events in relation to how to ensure inclusion of people with a disability in mainstream society. She has also owned and operated two restaurants and a holiday accommodation business.

Artists

Monte Lupo

Speakers' gifts are made by talented ceramicists with disability at Monte Lupo Arts. Monte Lupo offers beautiful handmade ceramic and textile artworks and homeware and provides employment opportunities for people with disability. Monte Lupo's employee artists manage each step of the production process, preparing the clay, glazing and painting.

Each detail is unique to the finished product and a testament to the hard work of their team members. Many of the artists have received national and international recognition for their work, and Monte Lupo is regularly featured in exhibitions across Australia, in addition to holding their own exhibitions. Monte Lupo is operated by disability support provider Multicap.

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