



Q.A.T

Final report: Pilot project 2023/2024

QAT (Queer Auslan Together) is a peer-support project funded by Transgender Victoria and run by Deafblind Victoria, where transgender and non-binary people connect to practice tactile Auslan and deafblind communication. Events are organised and facilitated by deafblind trans people.

The project aims to address social isolation and exclusion by fostering friendships and understanding between communities. Non-deafblind TGDNB participants gain skills and confidence in deafblind communication, and connection to the Deafblind community. Deafblind trans participants gain connection to the TGDNB community, as well as skills in event organisation and facilitation.

The pilot project began with a stall and an Auslan activity at the Trans Fete in Port Melbourne in August 2023, and then ran one evening per month at Ross House in central Melbourne for six months.



Section 1: Finances

Item	Estimated expenses	Actual expenses	Balance
Staffing	\$5100.00	\$6,510.09	- \$1,410.09
Overheads	\$500.00	\$823.34	- \$323.34
Travel for Deafblind participants	\$1000.00	\$142.38	\$857.62
Accommodation for Deafblind participant	\$1500.00	\$519.18	\$980.82
Access costs & general expenses	\$1000.00	\$1,105.01	- \$105.01
Deafblind Victoria management fee	\$900.00	\$900.00	\$0.00
Total	\$10,000.00	\$10,000.00	\$0.00

Section 2: Outcomes

This project was the first initiative to bring TGDNB and Deafblind communities together, providing a unique opportunity to share and learn diverse methods of communication.

Group attendees were diverse in gender, age, and ability. Participants ranged from young adults to seniors and included individuals who were Deafblind, hearing/sighted, hearing/blind and deaf/sighted. There were people with brain injuries, stroke survivors, wheelchair users, people with mental illnesses, and neurodivergent individuals. This diversity contributed to creating a safe and welcoming space for all participants.

Jasper, the key organiser of QAT sessions, had never organised and facilitated events before. He wrote session plans, managed logistics (promotion, RSVPs, catering, and room bookings) and built confidence with public speaking.

The pilot project provided a practice in deafblind communication and fostered a sense of community and personal growth for organisers and other participants. The experience gained and connections made lay a foundation for future initiatives and ongoing relationships within the TGDNB and Deafblind communities. Pathways to employment were created for TGDNB participants (see case study below).

Quantitative Results:

Estimated attendance at Trans Fete stall and Auslan activity: 20 people
Average attendance at Ross House events: 10 people per session

Everyone present at the QAT sessions at Ross House was part of the TGDNB community, except for one commguide supporting a Deafblind trans person, and one DBV volunteer who helped with set-up and catering for the sessions (these two supporters were not counted as attendees).

Qualitative Results:

Data Classification	Data
Participant feedback (Deafblind person)	"It was quite scary and out of my comfort zone, but now I’m proud of what I achieved. As time went on, I felt I could be more myself in that space. When I could put the pressure to facilitate aside and have one-on-one conversations, I felt I could just be myself."
Participant feedback (Deafblind person)	"I felt very comfortable in that space. I am hoping that in time we can make friends that continue outside the group."
Participant feedback (sighted hearing person)	"After an exhausting day at work I attended QAT and left feeling energised. I felt that I could take off the work mask and just be myself. It was chill, fun, inclusive and supportive."
Case study	One sighted hearing participant is now working as a “commguide” (a support worker that guides deafblind people and assists with communication in the community). One of his clients is a Deafblind trans person. At QAT, he talked with two participants who were already working as commguides, and realised that felt like the right area of work for him. He felt more confident to pursue that after being involved in this program.



Section 3: Reflections

What things worked, and what didn't?	This experience provided valuable learnings for Deafblind organisers, particularly in areas such as improving data recording for future events. Throughout the project, they were able to identify which structures and activities were effective and which needed refinement.
Did your plan change or adapt as you went along?	While one session experienced unexpectedly low attendance, this challenge was turned into an opportunity. The smaller group allowed for extended one-on-one communication practice and deeper social connections among those present. There were times that participants gave feedback about things they would like to learn, and planned activities were adjusted accordingly.
What would you do differently next time?	Next time we would plan for longer sessions, as Deafblind communication takes time, and as people chatted over the food break and the group took longer than expected to come back together to resume activities. In the participant feedback that we received, people talked about the activities they enjoyed, and made a lot of suggestions for future activities. This is fantastic, as it shows a keen interest in future sessions, but it also gives us some guidance in how to plan future sessions that will be fun, interesting and informative for participants.
What were the largest barriers you faced?	As the project was run by Deafblind individuals, there were inherent challenges and barriers to overcome. Things often took longer than anticipated. People with disabilities often don't receive adequate support for community participation, due to limited NDIS funding and inadequate numbers of support staff. The availability of support staff is particularly low for Deafblind people, as most disability support workers do not have training in Auslan and other forms of Deafblind communication. This made it challenging to arrange a time when Deafblind participants would have access to attending the program.
What surprised you the most throughout the program?	For me personally, reflecting on the project, the biggest surprise was my own abilities and progress. I did need a significant amount of support with some aspects of organising the program, but not to the extent that I expected in some areas.
How do you feel the program impacted you individually?	It was a safe space to push myself far out of my comfort zone and build skills and confidence to do things that I had no previous experience in doing. It was also a space where I could be open about my identity, which lead to my feeling more confident in expressing my identity more openly in my regular work environment at DBV, knowing that other DBV staff knew about and were supportive of this project. It felt good to have a leading role in creating a space where myself and other Deafblind TGDNB people could have our communication needs come first, and other TGDNB people would come along, excited to learn how to communicate with us. Conversations with other participants, throughout the program and after it ended, gave me a positive feeling about being part of creating exactly the kind of space I was hoping this would be.



Section 4: Sustainability

Was the amount of funding provided in the support package sufficient?	It did not cover adequate interpreting costs. Interpreters volunteered. After the project was complete, DBV contributed staff hours to do the final evaluation and reporting.
Were you able to find other sources of funding or in-kind partnership support for your project?	DBV provided some in-kind support (tactile interpreting tables and printed communication resources) and volunteers, and additional staff hours to complete the reporting. Participants used their individual NDIS funds to pay for support workers. TGV covered the costs of the Trans fete where the project was launched.
Do you feel it would be beneficial for the community for this project to continue?	Absolutely! This project provided a unique opportunity and a space that meets community needs that are not met anywhere else.
What would be your greatest challenge in continuing your project?	Our greatest challenge in continuing would be securing funding for staffing, venue, catering etc. Should any different arrangements need to be made that change the current structure, timing and location, it will be difficult to align participants' timetables, find accessible venue, etc.
How would the structure or scope of the program change if TPSP funding was not available?	Deafblind participants are motivated to see the program continue. However, if further TPSP funding is not available, the program would need to have a greater reliance on volunteers and would seek other funds. Ross House is a central and accessible location, known to the Deafblind community. DBV's office is also at Ross House, which gave us access to using the tactile interpreting tables for the program, making communication accessible for Deafblind participants. This would be a barrier if we needed to find somewhere that we could access a room for free. A Deafblind participant who lives in the country and has very limited access to community would not be able to attend without funding for transport and accommodation. There would be no catering at the sessions. The food break was a time for casual conversation, which provided an opportunity for people to make connections more naturally, not only through structured activities.
What would be the personal benefits to yourself of continuing this program?	This program is a project that is very close to my heart. It gives me an opportunity to create a safe and inclusive space for myself and others who would usually not have access to a space like this. I would have an opportunity to create stronger community connections, make friends, and find support. It would help me to build further skills and confidence. It would also give me a few extra hours of work a month, but honestly, that came at the end of the list for a reason – that is much less important to me than anything else I have said here.