

# 2016 Tweed Shire Access and Inclusion Awards

## **Transcript of speech by Equal Access and Advisory Committee Chair Milena Morrow**

Good evening everyone. We're delighted to have you here to share and participate in the Access & Inclusion Awards for 2016. The Equal Access Advisory Committee is very proud of this event because we've always been committed to actively work towards all residents in the Tweed, regardless of their circumstances, to live an enriching, meaningful and successful life in their own community. So these Awards are one way for us to achieve that goal, and in doing that, individuals, community groups, organisations and commercial businesses are being recognised and acknowledged for their contribution.

I've served on the Equal Access Advisory Committee for many years. I've held the position of chair three times across three different terms of Council. The committee has been made up of a wonderful and dedicated group of people that comprise diverse community representatives, council officers and at least one councillor. Together, we've initiated many changes and achieved many positive outcomes that have seen significant progress over the years. It has been very rewarding to be in this role to say the very least.

The Committee's role in the Awards strategy is varied. Committee members are part of the event planning committee and a few also make up the judging panel each year. But the main role is focusing on raising awareness around access and inclusion in the broader community, particularly the commercial and service world. This was an idea that actually originated back in 2007 when the first Business Access Awards was launched. We understood that people outside the disability arena weren't exposed to information regarding universal access, and how that can benefit an entire community. So the aim was to encourage them to work with us, and in doing so, they would receive public acknowledgement for their contribution. Unfortunately, that was a one-time event. Perhaps the Tweed Shire wasn't ready at the time.

In 2013, the newly formed committee reintroduced the idea to be included in Council's first Access and Inclusion Plan with an allocated budget. This is an acknowledgement by Council that the awards are an important part of an access and inclusion strategy along with all the practical changes and upgrades Council is undertaking in the Plan. The Plan is also aligned with the inception of the NDIS legislation, and as many of us know, both the local and Commonwealth government strategies is leading to significant change in the preparation for an inclusive world, where finally, people with disability will have choice and control, and will live in a way that aligns with their own interests, needs and aspirations.

So with the new world in mind, the Committee wanted to influence change in the Tweed so that the expectations of many will be met, as people with disability will want to take part in all aspects of life: political, social, economic, cultural, education and employment. We're also committed to raising awareness of the general community to understand that responsibility for improving access and inclusion not only rests with all residents in the Tweed, but that diversity is actually a positive social outcome.

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For those of you in the audience who may not be aware why this change is being promoted so strongly. It always has been, but more now than ever before because Australia signed the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* and authorised in 2008. In short, the general principle of the Convention is to “have respect for difference and acceptance for people with disability as part of human diversity and humanity, where there is no discrimination, equal opportunities and accessibility”. So there is no turning back, and it’s not something that’s just being imposed on Tweed residents only. This is occurring on a national and global scale. Countries all over the world are committing to this shift, so it’s a great opportunity to break the cycle of the US and THEM mindset. In the future, there can only be WE.

### So let me share a few quotes:

***“If I lived in a society where being in a wheelchair was no more remarkable than wearing glasses, and if the community was completely accepting and accessible, my disability would be an inconvenience and not much more than that. It is society which disables me far more seriously and completely than the fact that I have Spina Bifida.”***

*“Just because a man lacks the use of his eyes doesn’t mean he lacks vision.”* **Stevie Wonder**

*“I was slightly brain damaged at birth, and I want people to see that they shouldn’t let a disability get in the way. I want to raise awareness – I want to turn my disability into ability.”* **Susan Boyle**

The Access Committee are very encouraged with the continued interest shown from the community in making nominations, and most nominations in each of the four years have been new nominees, not repeated. So as I sit here today at the fourth awards event and a record number of nominations received, we believe that the Tweed Shire is ready.

With the increased nominations this year, it was a really hard task to select award recipients. As a long-term member of the Access Committee, and one of the judges, I would like to emphasise that being nominated is a reward in itself because it means that people notice, acknowledge and recognise your work. Improving access and inclusion is a voluntary act in changing the physical environment, attitudes and behaviour. This year was particularly tough for the judging panel as there were more nominations than ever before. What the judges look for is outstanding achievement that has the power to influence change in a broad spectrum of the community and that is above and beyond what is expected for an organisation, business or individual. So we would like to congratulate all the nominees. Whatever the outcome, you are all winners because your contribution was acknowledged. And thank you for that.

Before I close, I would like to offer my thanks to those who have made this event possible:

- Kristian Keogh - our MC and our entertainers tonight
- Bill Chaffey – paratriathlete and patron for the Access and Inclusion Awards

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- Tracy Barrell, tonight's guest speaker. Tracy is also a great advocate for change and is a very active and well-known member of this community
- To Tweed Shire Council and all the members of the Steering Committee who did an amazing job in organising this event
- To my fellow committee members, thanks for another great year as we couldn't achieve what we have without us all pulling together. And a special thank you to Una Cowdroy for continually volunteering her time to conduct the access audits across the Tweed Shire in accordance with the Access and Inclusion Plan

I hope you all enjoy the evening. Thank you.

