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Yarra Trams and Travellers Aid: Transforming accessibility on the world's largest tram network

Social Traders. 4 March 2024

Beginning in 2021, Yarra Trams and Travellers Aid (TA) joined forces in a ground-breaking collaboration to enhance accessibility on the world's largest tram network. Their shared mission was clear: to break down barriers for individuals with mobility challenges, allowing them to seamlessly navigate from tram stops to major events and back. This initiative aimed to transform the public transport experience and empower those with accessibility needs to actively engage in their community.

Empowering inclusivity

Travellers Aid, a certified social enterprise committed to fostering inclusivity, played a pivotal role in this partnership. Equipped with wheelchair accessible buggy, personal guidance, and boundless enthusiasm, TA staff and volunteers worked hand-in-hand with Yarra Trams personnel during the 2021 Australian Open in Melbourne. The success of this collaborative effort was evident as 63 patrons with mobility challenges were able to enjoy the event without hindrance.

Building on success: A growing impact

The positive outcomes of the collaboration quickly gained momentum, leading to its expansion beyond the Australian Open. By 2023, the partnership had evolved to include major events such as Moomba, the Grand Prix, Anzac Day Dawn Service, St Kilda Festival, and the Melbourne International Flower & Garden Show. This expansion marked a significant step forward in promoting inclusivity and accessibility in public spaces.

Driven by the success of their initial efforts, Yarra Trams and TA took their partnership to



new heights by addressing planned network disruptions.

“When services change, passengers’ journeys can be disrupted, and they may not be able to complete their journey without substantial impact. Travellers Aid have been able to help our passengers connect across the gap in their journey get to where they need to be.”- Francesca Maclean, Social & Sustainable Procurement Manager

This strategic move ensured that individuals with mobility challenges could continue their journeys uninterrupted, reaching vital destinations such as employment, healthcare facilities, and social engagements despite network challenges. The success of this partnership snowballed, and by 2023, 9,671 individuals total had been supported.

Social procurement: Beyond obstacles, creating opportunities

The collaboration between Yarra Trams and TA transcended the realm of overcoming obstacles - it created opportunities. In 2022, Travellers Aid won the Victoria Tourism Awards Inaugural Lord Mayor’s Award. This was awarded to Travellers Aid for enhancing the visitor experience in Melbourne.

“The award could have been presented to any of the major events or attractions in this state, but it was awarded to a small NFP - Social Enterprise for making participation and engagement with everything Melbourne has to offer available to people of all abilities“- Elias Lebbos, Chief Executive Officer, Travellers Aid

This innovative partnership stands as a testament to the power of social procurement, showcasing that when organisations unite with a shared vision, they can generate positive impacts that extend far beyond immediate challenges. The partnership not only enhanced accessibility, it created a lasting impact on individuals' lives, promoting inclusivity and enriching communities.

“The relationship with Yarra Trams has without a doubt opened many doors that would have been very difficult to get through. It provided Travellers Aid with a subtle but clear endorsement that promoted our work far better than any advertising campaign would have.”- Elias Lebbos, Chief Executive Officer, Travellers Aid

