

5. Big 'A' Creative New Zealand Arts For All Award 2011

Winner: Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth

Judges' comment: "We commend all the organisations nominated in this award for taking first steps in becoming more accessible to the disabled community. The Govett-Brewster Art Gallery's commitment to accessibility is underpinned by the New Plymouth District Council's Disability Strategy – an example of best practice that gave the Govett-Brewster the edge. Along with sign language and touch tours, staff disability awareness training and large-print exhibition guides, the focus in 2010 was redeveloping its website to optimise its accessibility. This nomination was a fine example of an arts organisation developing its audience by increasing access and we look forward to seeing the next steps on its journey to accessibility."

Some background: The Govett-Brewster Art Gallery is committed to making art accessible to as many people as possible, and looks for innovative and practical ways to ensure its exhibitions and programmes meet that goal.

The gallery has constantly been at the forefront of the New Plymouth District Council's moves to improve its attitude to disabled people, says councillor Lance Girling-Butcher, chair of the disabilities issues working party.

"The gallery has conducted special training for staff and held exhibitions that highlight disability or help to educate people on attitudes to this complex subject.

"I particularly remember a fascinating show by Venezuelan artist Javier Téllez, which showed a group of blind people feeling an elephant and describing their reactions. As someone who has recently gone blind, I learned a lot and I am sure that fully sighted people learned more."

The gallery's redeveloped website, launched in March, was designed and coded with accessibility issues for users and assistive technology in mind. Features include high contrast between the text colour and background screen colour and minimal page clutter. Clickable targets, buttons and images are deliberately generous in size for people with motor skill difficulties.

Lance Girling-Butcher said that as a blind reader he finds the new disabled-friendly website easy to use and keep up with exhibition changes.

Throughout 2010 the gallery ran regular sign language exhibition tours, working with local sign language interpreter Fleur Daniel. She described Govett-Brewster's commitment to running events that include the Deaf community as forward thinking, innovative and inclusive.

Staff at the gallery have attended disability awareness training and attend regular refresher courses.

The gallery will continue to build on the three strands of the Council's Disability Strategy: that its services, facilities and assets are accessible to all people;

that staff are aware of disability in the community and receive appropriate training; and that staff are active champions of an inclusive society.

The gallery plans to put the award money towards improving signage in the gallery, continuing regular sign language tours and developing plain language descriptions for exhibitions for the blind community. In addition, the gallery will be consulting with local disability communities in the coming months and will recognise Saturday 3 December, International Day of Disability, as part of its public events programme.

www.govettbrewster.com

Finalist:

The other finalist was **Odd Socks Productions** of Wellington, a purpose-built inclusive theatre company that develops visual performances and advises the arts sector about Deaf culture and New Zealand Sign Language.

The judges described Odd Socks as “a young, dynamic and innovative company creating a new form of theatre. Odd Socks has the potential to become leaders in ensuring artistic opportunities and access to the Deaf community, and building bridges between the Deaf and hearing communities in New Zealand.”