
Midsumma Pathways Evaluation 2020–2024

Content

About Midsumma Pathways	p. 3
Program Outcomes	p. 4
Participant Demographics	p. 5
Outcome Measurement	p. 6
2022 Festival	p. 7
2023 Festival	p. 8
2024 Festival	p. 9
Festival Engagements by Participants:	
About The Data	p. 10
Workshops	p. 11
Mentorships	p. 12
Mentor Testimonials	p. 13
Organisational Capacity Building	p. 14
How Midsumma Has Built Capacity	p. 16
Funding	p. 17
Partnerships	p. 18
Contact	p. 19

Acknowledgment

Midsumma acknowledges the traditional owners of the land that the Pathways Program exists on, who have been making art and sharing stories on this land for over sixty thousand years. Sovereignty has never been ceded.

This always was and always will be Aboriginal Land.

About Midsumma Pathways

Midsumma Pathways is a nine-month mentorship and career development program for Deaf, disabled and neurodiverse LGTBIQA+ artists. Co-designed by program participants, Midsumma Pathways provides a queer context for emerging artists with disability to develop their artistic skills and practices alongside a community of peers and industry professionals. Program participants can work in any art form, and experienced program staff provide individualised support for access needs.

From 2020–2024, Midsumma Pathways has delivered a national, hybrid (online/in person) program for 38 participants across four years. Opt-in opportunities for artists have been offered throughout the program, and the 2023 and 2024 Midsumma Festivals saw significant increase in projects, presentations and engagement by alumni of the program.

In the Midsumma Pathways team, we work within multiple intersecting frameworks to deliver best-practice inclusive, accessible and community-engaged arts projects:

- In line with the social model of disability, we recognise that people are disabled by the barriers created by society.
- With an organisation founded on the principals of queer theory, we challenge traditional assumptions around gender and sexual identities and encourage authentic self-expression.
- Midsumma Pathways has been co-designed to ensure the needs of program participants are prioritised at each stage of program planning.
- We work with flexible timelines and hybrid delivery modes to support crip time. We understand that program participants need to be able to work at their own pace within their own capacities.
- We prioritise deep collaboration between Midsumma, program staff and program participants, and respect the importance of relationship in creating this national body of cultural and creative praxis.

Participant Testimonial

I've never felt like I belong in the art space or the advocacy space. I didn't think I could present my work or say "yes I'm an artist and yes I make work". What I can come away from this knowing is that I can take up space

Image: *Midsummica* at Midsumma Festival 2024
© Darren Gill

Program Outcomes

Program participants have increased skills and confidence to participate and contribute to the community, including increased self-advocacy skills.

Program participants (Deaf, disabled, neurodiverse and chronically ill artists) have built sustainable networks and ongoing support structures with peers, community and potential future collaborators to support continued work in the arts sector.

Midsumma has built capacity as an accessible employer through staff/board training and milestones in our workforce inclusion plan.

Statistics

– 12

In 2020–2021 and 2021–2022
Midsumma Pathways accepted
12 participants.

– 14

In 2022–2023, Midsumma Pathways
accepted 14 participants.

– 38

In 2023–2024, Midsumma Pathways
worked on engaging the original
38 participants in face-to-face
experiences they were unable to
have from 2020-2022 due to Covid
lockdowns.



Participant Demographics

Identity

58% identify as transgender, non-binary and gender diverse

16% identify as male

26% identify as female

Location

69% reside in Naarm/Melbourne

7% reside in Regional Victoria

9% reside in Boorloo/Perth

4% reside in Meanjin/Brisbane

7% reside in Eora/Sydney

4% reside in Kaurna Yerta/ Adelaide

Artforms

36% are performing artists

9% are visual artists

11% are dance artists

24% are multidisciplinary artists

2% are textile artists

4% are filmmakers

4% are musicians

2% are curators

7% are writers

Engagements

66 — Over the course of 2020–2024 across the delivery of four cohorts, a total of 66 people with disability were employed to deliver grant activities. Employment Opportunities for people with disability generated by the Program included:

- Event Producer
- Program Coordinator
- Mentors
- Workshop Facilitators
- Guest Presenters (Alumni)
- Selection Panellists
- Pathways Alumni Advisory Group
- Presenters for Auslan Videos
- Filmmakers
- Interviewees for film
- Talent for Photoshoot
- Access & Inclusion Training Providers
- Performer fees
- Access Consultants

Participant Testimonial

Building in this really open, safe environment really enriched my practice. It really helped me take a lot of quite big steps to move away from the industry and really look at how much more an art practice can be about the community, the people that you work with and just doing what is safe and empowering to you rather than having to get a status quo.

Outcome Measurement

Midsumma is Australia's leading queer arts and cultural organisation, bringing together a rich tapestry of LGBTQIA+ artists, performers, communities, and audiences.

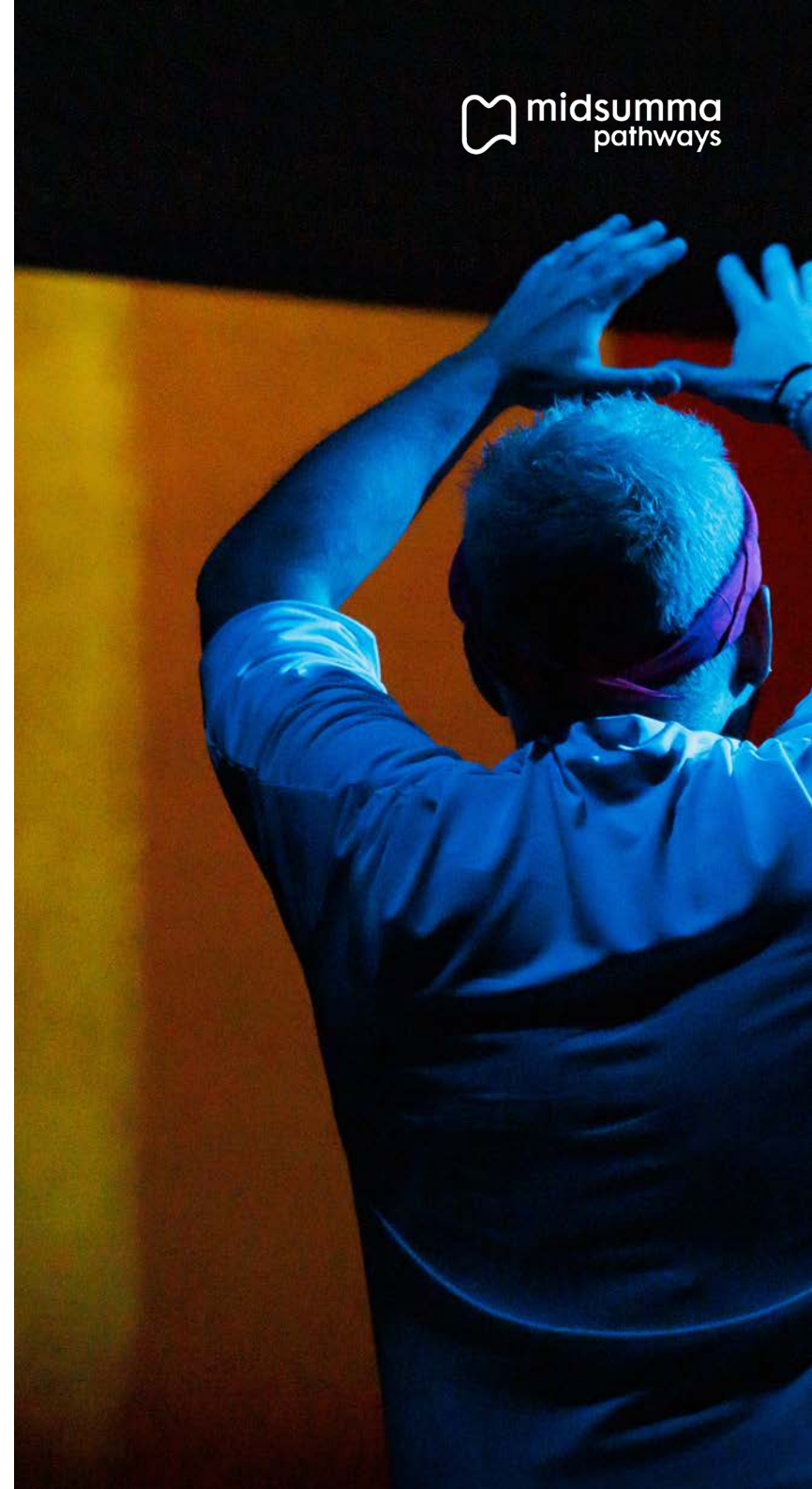
Our flagship event, Midsumma Festival, spans 22 days during Naarm/ Melbourne's summer (January/February), offering a vibrant array of queer events that celebrate both hidden and mainstream queer culture, featuring talent from local, interstate, and international artists.

The Midsumma Festival program features a curated Midsumma Presents lineup alongside a community-driven Open-access stream, showcasing the lived experiences of marginalised voices, the expression of queer history, and the celebration of new ideas and stories through world-class art and performance.

To measure the outcomes of the Midsumma Pathways program, the project team tracks participant engagement in the annual Midsumma Festival. Reflecting the inclusive and accessible frameworks that guide the program, the project team does not differentiate between the types of engagements participants may have during the Festival.

Some participants attend as audience members from interstate, while others present a full-scale work, a one-off talk, or a tour. Each engagement is crafted by the participant in collaboration with program staff, aligning with the participants' skills and career aspirations.

Image: *Midsummica* at Midsumma Festival 2024
© Darren Gill



2022 Festival

– 4 Engagements by Participants

The low engagement in 2022 was due to several factors:

- The arts sector was hit hard by Covid-19, with an Omicron spike just before the festival, affecting both artists and audiences.
- In-person workshops planned during the festival were canceled due to health advice and participants' concerns.
- People with disabilities, at higher risk from Covid-19, led to fewer projects and in-person engagements during lockdowns. There has been a slow return to in-person events, depending on individual health and preferences.

Image: *The Demographic Dance Off*
at Midsumma Festival 2022 © Sofia Sisconetto



2023 Festival

– 39 Engagements by Participants

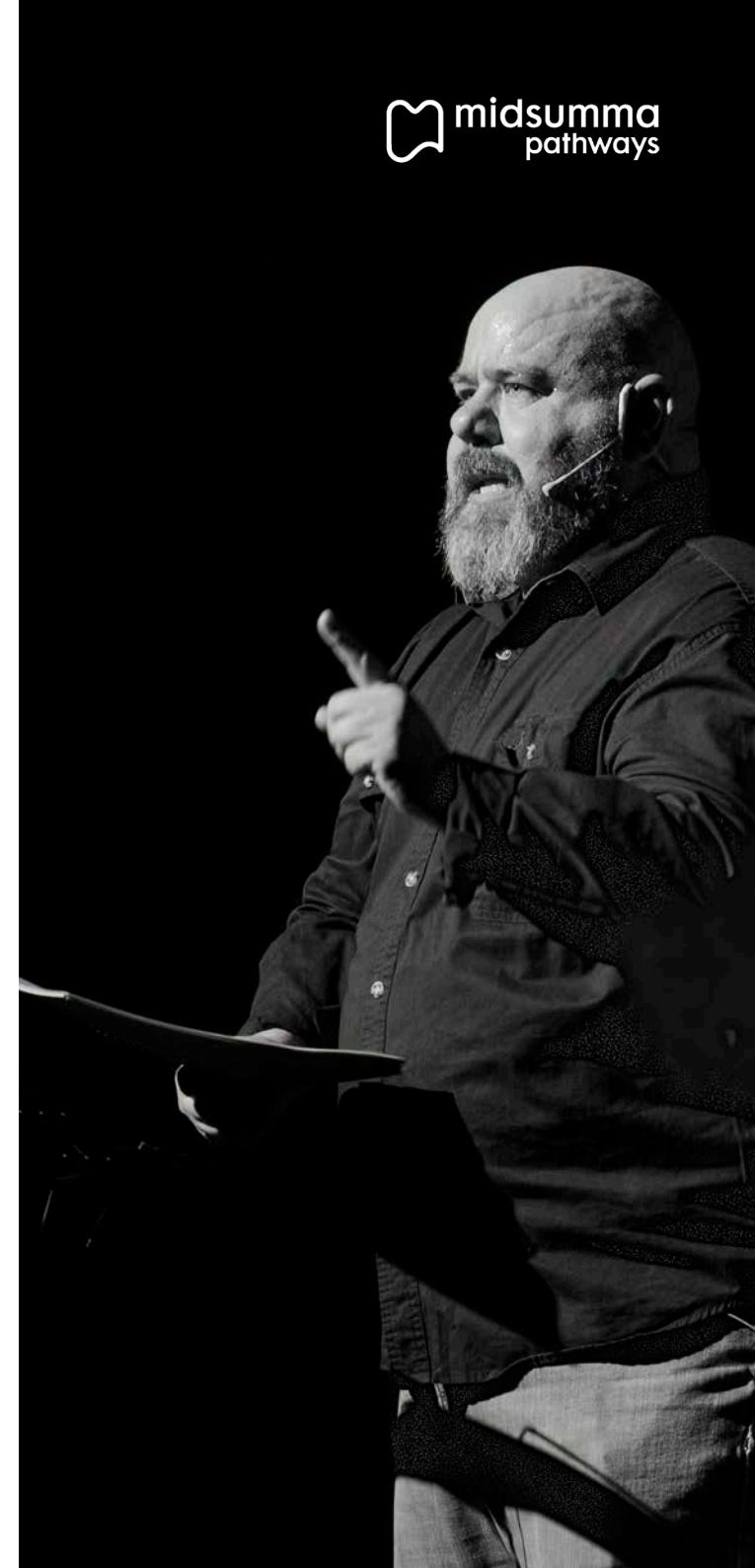
From 2022 to 2023:
875% increase in engagements

Testimonial

*I belong in the art space or the
advocacy space... I didn't think
I could present my work or say "yes
I'm an artist and yes I make work."*

*What I can come away from
this knowing is that I can take up
space and make art and that people
will believe it.*

Left: *Lemontree*, Right: *Transmansplaining*
at Midsumma Festival 2023 © Tan McCulloch



2024 Festival

– 73 Engagements by Participants

From 2023 to 2024:
87% increase in engagements

From 2022 to 2024:
1725% increased in engagement
by program participants in the
Midsumma Festival.

Testimonial

Midsumma Pathways has given me the courage to take risks in life again about myself out there again. I'm passionate about my artwork again, and I am passionate about community again.

Left: Akii Ngo with Arri, service-dog, at *Midsumma Matters* © Suzanne Phoenix, Right: *Midsummica* at Midsumma Festival 2024 © Darren Gill



Festival Engagements by Participants: About The Data

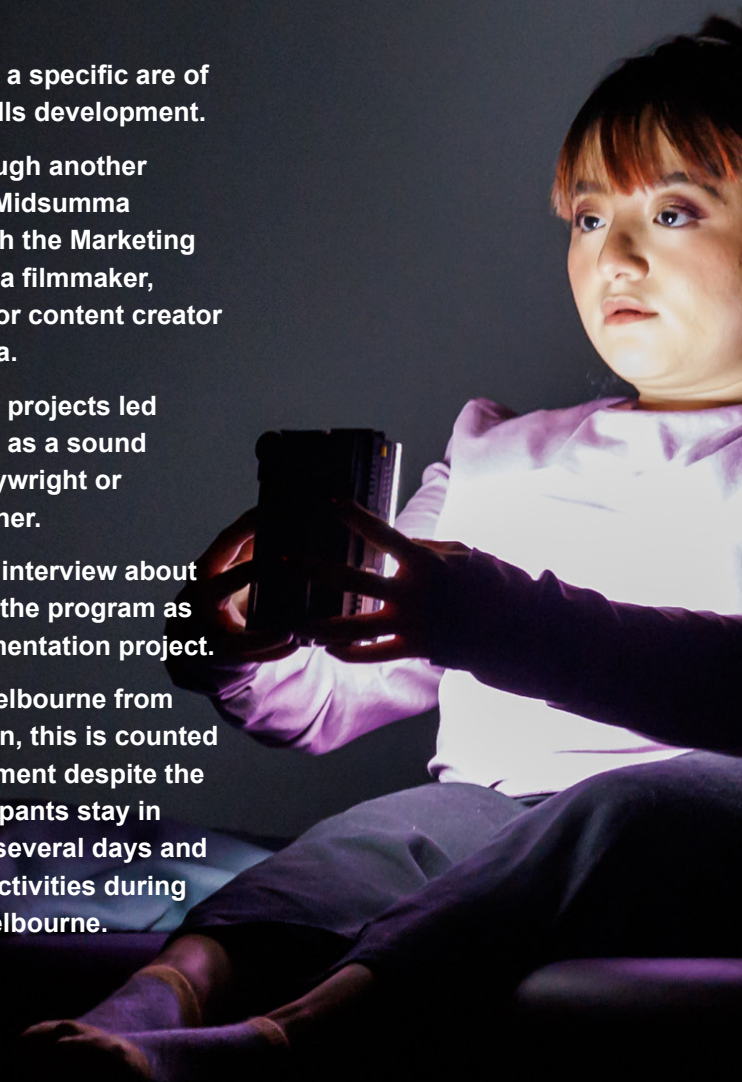
We believe that Midsumma Pathways participants' and alumni's engagement in Midsumma Festival is not the sole measure of the program's success, nor is continuous public work a measure of an artist's success. Rest and recuperation are crucial for artistic growth, and we emphasize this with our participants. There's no pressure to participate in Festival events if they lack capacity or desire.

However, documenting involvement in the 2022, 2023, and 2024 Midsumma Festivals provides a tangible measure of program outcomes, which we've used here. The reported engagements are only those known to Midsumma, but we also celebrate and encourage informal and self-directed connections.

Participant engagement during the Festival period varies significantly in time commitment, artform, role in project and funding sources for artist fees and/or other project support. Examples of "engagements" include:

- Directing, performing or producing a season of a performance work. This is counted as one engagement despite the level of time commitment being significantly more than a one-off panel appearance.
- Curating and/or making work for a Visual Arts exhibition.
- Attending a performance and/or event as an audience member.
- Attending an Artist Gathering specifically for Midsumma Pathways participants during Festival time.
- MCing for one of Midsumma's Major Events such as the Victoria's Pride Street Party
- Presenting a tour, talk or panel.
- Attending a Masterclass by a featured artist within the Midsumma program.
- Volunteering in a specific area of practice for skills development.
- Paid work through another department at Midsumma such as through the Marketing Department as a filmmaker, photographer, or content creator for social media.
- Contributing to projects led by other artists as a sound technician, playwright or costume designer.
- Conducting an interview about experiences in the program as part of a documentation project.
- Travelling to Melbourne from interstate. Again, this is counted as one engagement despite the fact that participants stay in Melbourne for several days and do a range of activities during their time in Melbourne.

Image: Crystal Nguyen, 2022–23 cohort,
Midsumma at Midsumma Festival 2023
© Darren Gill



Workshops

– 51

From 2019–2023, 51 workshops delivered by industry leaders on topics including:

- Self-advocacy and disabled empowerment
- Media engagement
- Grant-writing and budgets
- Producing
- First Nations perspectives
- Multidisciplinary arts practices
- Self identity

53% of workshops were delivered by d/Deaf, disabled or neurodiverse professionals.

Image: Midsumma Pathways 2023–24 cohort, *Midsummica* at Midsumma Festival 2023
© Darren Gill



Mentorships

– 47

From 2019–2023, 47 Mentors delivered over 376 one to one mentorship sessions.

Mentors were selected by program participants with support from the Pathways program team on the basis of their specialist skills, knowledges and networks developed from extensive experience both nationally and internationally across a range of artforms and contemporary practice.

Pathways Mentors have included several celebrated Australia artists:

- Maude Davey
- Victoria Falconer-Pritchard
- Vidya Rajan
- Anni Davey
- Jen Cloher
- Jodee Mundy
- Adena Jacobs
- Jax Jacki Brown
- River Lin

Image: Jessie Ngaio, 2022–23 cohort,
Midsumma at Midsumma Festival 2023
© Darren Gill



Participant Testimonial

The thing about Pathways that I love is meeting people that have been amazing to talk to and learn from. I'm really excited about the mentor who has taken a chance on me.

Mentor Testimonials

Midsumma Pathways is essential for queer arts practitioners to connect, especially emerging artists. It helps them place themselves within a broader network of artists, providing representation and peer support that's crucial in Australia.

Mentorship in the arts is invaluable. Programs like Midsumma Pathways help break down power relations in the arts sector, which can be difficult to navigate, especially for marginalized communities.

This mentorship was enlightening as it made me more aware of issues around accessibility, particularly through my mentee's experiences with autism. It broadened my understanding of inclusivity in the arts and society.

Lateral dialogue, skill-sharing, and cultural exchange are crucial. Programs like this create peer networks that support artists with dynamic disabilities, ensuring they can participate without pressure.

It's vital for each generation of artists to be supported by those before them. Midsumma Pathways connects likeminded individuals and creates a structure that fosters community and growth in the LGBTQIA+ disabled artist sector.

This is the most dynamic program I've participated in. It empowers queer disabled folks, offering representation, networks, and agency in a way that's unique and continuously evolving in Australia.



Image: *Midsummica* at Midsumma Festival 2024
© Darren Gill

Organisational Capacity Building

From 2020 to 2024, Midsumma staff have received training in a range of priority areas of Access and Inclusion such as:

- Disability Cultures
- Blind / Low Vision Awareness Training
- Deaf Awareness Training
- Autism Awareness Training

A survey of core Midsumma staff and Board that were part of Festival delivery from 2020 – 2024 indicated that Midsumma Pathways has supported Midsumma to build capacity over time as an accessible and inclusive employer and event presenter.

100% of Staff and Board surveyed indicated that their knowledge and understanding of the needs and priorities of Deaf, disabled, chronically ill and neurodiverse LGBTIQ+ artists and community had increased following their engagement with Midsumma Pathways.

77% of Staff and Board surveyed indicated that they learned the most about creating safe(r) spaces for Deaf, disabled and neurodiverse artists and access needs for audiences (such as Audio Description, Auslan interpretation and Quiet Rooms/Low Sensory Spaces).

Image: *Midsummica* at Midsumma Festival 2023
© Darren Gill



When asked how their knowledge, attitudes or understanding of the needs and priorities of Deaf, disabled and neurodiverse artists have changed over time, staff and board reported:

Midsumma Pathways has deepened my understanding of the nuanced needs of Deaf, disabled, chronically ill, and neurodiverse LGBTIQ+ artists. It's highlighted the importance of small changes in event delivery methods, which can significantly enhance inclusivity without affecting others.

Through training and exposure, I now ask better questions and choose more inclusive systems in both creative and operational contexts. This expanded awareness is a vital part of my toolkit for fostering genuine inclusion across all areas of work.

Pathways taught me that many queer, disabled creatives are already prolific but have been excluded due to unmet access needs. Pairing them with experienced mentors showed the importance of person-to-person networks for opening doors to professional arts opportunities.

Creating spaces for LGBTIQ+ disabled artists to connect has been vital. Witnessing their solidarity and community formation, has been deeply impactful in my own practice.

The electric buzz from the audience after the first Midsummica show in July 2023, featuring performances by Pathways artists, was unforgettable. The audience was visibly moved and invigorated by the powerful, unique works of queer, disabled artists.

Integrating Pathways participants into broader Midsumma events has been most impactful. These shifts have led to new partnerships, improved programs, and a more engaged and diverse audience.



Image: Cynthia Spleen, 2022–23 cohort, *Midsummica* at Midsumma Festival 2023
© Darren Gill

How Midsumma Has Built Capacity

Midsumma's journey toward becoming a more inclusive employer for Deaf, disabled, and neurodiverse artists and arts workers likely involved several key strategies and initiatives.

Education and Training: Midsumma invested in training and educational programs to raise awareness among its staff about the needs and experiences of Deaf, disabled, and neurodiverse individuals. This could include workshops on accessibility, disability awareness, and neurodiversity. **Accessibility Improvements:** Midsumma made physical and digital accessibility improvements to its spaces, events, and online platforms.

Policy Development: Developing inclusive policies and procedures was essential for fostering a welcoming and supportive environment for Deaf, disabled, and neurodiverse individuals.

Partnerships and Consultation: Midsumma collaborated with disability advocates, Deaf communities, and neurodiverse individuals to ensure their initiatives are informed by the needs and perspectives of these communities.

Diverse Representation: Midsumma actively sought to increase the representation of Deaf, disabled, and neurodiverse artists and arts workers in their programming, staff, and leadership positions.

Continuous Improvement: Building capacity for inclusivity is an ongoing process. Midsumma engaged in regular evaluation and feedback processes to identify areas for improvement and adapt their practices accordingly. (Quiet Rooms/Low Sensory Spaces).

Image: *Midsummica* at Midsumma Festival 2023
© Darren Gill



Funding

Midsumma Pathways was funded
by the Australian Government
Department of Social Services.



Australian Government
Department of Social Services



Participant Testimonial

*I think I've genuinely learned a lot about myself as an artist with disability.
I think I've found a whole new world and language for things that I had no real
grounding in before this.*

Partnerships

Midsumma Pathways has developed partnerships over the life of the program with key Australian arts and disability organisations who have supported Pathways artists throughout and beyond the program.

Venue Partners

Abbotsford Convent
ACMI
Arts House
Dance House
Fed Square
Footscray Community Arts Centre
La Mama Theatre
Malthouse Theatre
National Gallery of Victoria (NGV)
Science Gallery Melbourne
The Motley Bauhaus
Theatre Works St Kilda

Access Partners

Arts Access Victoria
Auslan Stage Left
Expression Australia
Vitae Veritas
Vision Australia Radio

Accommodation Partner

Quest Collingwood

Abbotsford
Convent.

acmi

ARTS ACCESS VICTORIA

ARTS HOUSE

auslan **STAGE LEFT**

AUSPICIOUS
ARTS
PROJECTS

DH

Expression
Australia

FOOTSCRAY
COMMUNITY
ARTS

LA MAMA

MALTHOUSE
THEATRE

MOTLEY
BAUHAUS

NGV

QUEST
COLLINGWOOD

SCIENCE GALLERY

TW
THEATRE WORKS
ST KILDA

Vision
Australia
Blindness Low Vision Opportunity

VITAE VERITAS



Contact

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Harriet Devlin is a performer, producer, and arts worker specializing in inclusive project design that meets the access needs of diverse artists and communities. Currently, as Artist Development Manager at Midsumma Festival, Harriet works to embed accessibility and community engagement across the festival.

She also leads Midsumma Pathways, a year-round mentorship and career development program for queer artists with disability. Harriet is a NAATI-accredited Auslan interpreter, a member of the Rawcus Ensemble, and holds a Bachelor of Arts from the University of Melbourne and a Diploma of Interpreting from RMIT.

