Human rights and disabilities
Student resources: Information Sheet 3

The ins and outs of access
In Australia we now have laws to protect disabled people from discrimination. This means that they must be treated as fairly as people without any disability. The laws are written down in the Federal (Australia wide) Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (DDA). The Disability Discrimination Act makes it against the law (illegal) for public places to be inaccessible to people with a disability. This applies to existing places as well as places under construction. Existing places must be modified and be accessible (except where this would involve “unjustifiable hardship”).

Places used by the public include:
- public footpaths and walkways
- educational institutions
- shops and department stores
- banks, credit unions, building societies
- parks, public swimming pools, public toilets, and pedestrian malls
- hospitals
- travel agents
- cafes, restaurants, pubs
- theatres and other places of entertainment
- lawyers’ and legal services offices
- libraries
- sporting venues
- social and sporting clubs
- government offices and services
- hairdressers and beauty salons
- dentists’ and doctors’ surgeries
- public transport including trains, buses, ferries, boats, ships and planes.

What is expected?
Every area open to the public should be open to people with a disability. They should expect to enter and make use of places used by the public, if people without a disability can do so.
For example:
- Places used by the public should be accessible at the entrance and inside;
- Facilities in these places should also be accessible (with for example, wheelchair-accessible toilets, lift buttons within reach, tactile and audible lift signals for people with vision impairments); and
- Rather than them being confined to a segregated space or the worst seats, all areas within places used by the public should be accessible to people with a disability.

While changes may not happen overnight, people with a disability should expect that changes will be made. A person with a disability has every right to complain when they are discriminated against because a place used by the public is inaccessible.