



**vision australia**  
blindness and low vision services

## **Audio Description 2005**

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### **About Us**

Vision Australia Limited is a company limited by guarantee. We are the largest provider of services to people who are blind or vision impaired in Australia, assisting more than 38,000 children and adults to live the lives they choose.

Vision Australia works with people to enable them to experience life to its fullest. We offer a range of services that can be tailored to a person's level of vision and their individual needs.

Our services are provided by a dedicated team of people from a wide variety of professions, including more than 3,200 volunteers who freely give their time and skills to help Vision Australia provide its essential services.

Vision Australia assists clients in their homes, in our centres and in the community. We operate through regional and metropolitan locations in NSW, the ACT and Victoria. Our Information and Library Service is available to people who have difficulty reading printed material across Australia.

It costs more than \$60 million each year to deliver our services to people who are blind, vision impaired. We rely on the generosity of people in the community who share our vision to raise approximately 60 percent of these funds.

Last Year RBS merged successfully with 3 other blindness agencies – RVIB, VAF, and NILS to become a National Blindness organisation. We are still in the early stages of re-branding and at the moment it is business as usual.

## **Vision Australia Vision and Mission statements**

### **Our Vision**

- People who are blind or vision impaired are accessing and fully participating in every chosen facet of life.

### **Our Mission**

- Excelling in the creation of a community partnership of knowledge, skills and expertise to enrich the participation in life for people who are blind or vision impaired and their families.

## **What is Audio Description?**

What is Audio Description ? – Service developed for, Art of describing, fills the gaps

## **Vision Australia and Audio Description – Initiated in....and Began in Aust in 1988....**

Now widely available in the US and the UK.

Audio description is available in a variety of formats here and overseas including theatre, TV, videos and museums.

Marjorie West AM of Vision Australia was part of the initial six trainees and has worked tirelessly to promote and educate many in the need and art of AD.

## **Marjorie West AM of Vision Australia in Victoria....**

Marjorie West AM of Vision Australia in Victoria, supported by Marion Cumming, approached RBS to include Audio Description into its services.

Royal Blind Society had been providing audio description services to the Sydney area since the Olympic and Paralympic Arts Festivals in 2000. Broadening community access to the arts.

Royal Blind Society continued to provide the service for majority of theatre productions during both the Olympic and Paralympic Arts Festivals. Since then Audio Description of live theatre has been increasingly on offer, whilst the service continues to extend into other domains...

## **Anything you can see we can describe.....**

Audio Description can be adapted to a variety of events and venues, ranging from cinema through to live performance, galleries, museums, heritage and outdoor sites.

paint a picture using words of anything the sighted person can see - static displays, movement, exhibitions, interiors, colour schemes, costumes, architectural features, gardens, natural and built environments.

## **In Live Theatre**

Describers work in pairs

Hand out small radio receiver and unobtrusive earpiece to patrons upon arrival.

Pre-booked patrons are ushered in early to hear the Program notes, costumes and stage settings broadcasted about 15-20min prior to the show.

During the show, a live description of visual elements and on-stage action is given, without interrupting or speaking over the actors' lines.

Recipients hear what's happening on stage in one ear and in the other ear they **hear the describers complimenting the characters' actions, fleeting winks and body language.**

No longer does a vision impaired person need to depend on someone next to them to explain what is happening - a process which can be frustrating for both parties as well as causing annoyance to others nearby.

An experience, which may previously have been less than rewarding is given new dimensions and the theatre made to come alive through access to elements which vision impaired theatre-goers might otherwise miss.

With audio description you don't miss a thing!

### **Technology in Focus**

A powerful, portable FM transmitter in a sound proof booth is used by the Audio Describers, to broadcast the description to the discreet hand held receivers scattered throughout the audience.

Both describers wear headphones to hear the actors dialogue.

### **Technology in Focus cont'**

Describers can work from a booth with direct vision of the stage or from another soundproof area with close circuit TV (CCTV) of stage.

Receivers are returned at the conclusion of the performance.

Use of the service is complementary for patrons after purchase of theatre tickets.

### **Where is it available ?**

Majority of our work is providing AD of live theatre for scheduled performances.

Working a number of theatres in Sydney  
The Ensemble theatre at Kirribilli,

all three theatres of Sydney Opera House, STC and for select productions at the new home of the Sydney Theatre Company - Sydney Theatre, Walsh Bay

In Canberra – available at the Canberra Theatre Centre

Great opportunity to see how things work behind the scenes of some wonderful productions and theatre companies.

### **Where else is it available ?**

Possibilities are endless

2 main areas exploring thus far are – museums and places of interest, such as outdoor sites.

In conjunction with Vision Australia, The Powerhouse Museum has developed a “Highlight Audio Described Touch Tour” for people who are blind or vision impaired,

incorporates a visual description of the museum, its objects and exhibits into the regular tours conducted by guides with sighted guide training as well as rich background knowledge of the exhibits and their history.

We also explain the sounds that can be heard whilst travelling around the museum and location of various amenities and landmarks.

### **Outdoor Areas – Cremorne and St Thomas Rest Park**

Describers have worked in collaboration with North Sydney Council to prepare recorded descriptions of this historical trail at Cremorne Point. The self guided walk incorporates the history of the area with a visual description of buildings and panoramas of major landmarks.

#### **-St Thomas Rest Park History Trail**

This is an audio description of the historic church and cemetery at Crows Nest, Sydney, the resting place of many famous colonial figures since its foundations were laid in 1836. Available on CD or audiocassette.

## **Patron Feedback “The Description Contributed....**

Here is what some patrons of the Audio Described Theatre service had to say:

## **Patron Feedback “The Audio Description added a new dimension....**

- “Audio descriptions were vital at this performance.... a fantastic idea!”

## **Profile of an audio describer**

Joel Snyder, of Audio Description Associates, best describes the essential elements of Audio Description during the founding conference of British based Audio Description Association

### **1 Observation**

need to increase your level of awareness and become an active “see-er”. To truly notice all the visual elements that make up an event. So the ability to “say what you see”

### **2 Edit**

Most effective describers edit or cull from what they see to only include what is most valid, what is most important, what is most critical to an understanding or appreciation of an event. Do not evaluate or interpret

Only a few precious seconds to convey an image, mood.

## **Language heading at top and then Vocal Skills**

### **3 Language**

Good command of English

How many different ways can one say walk (give a moment's pause) – stroll, saunter, amble, march, stride, hike, stagger, toddle

Words need to be – objective, vivid, imaginative drawn words, phrases & metaphors.

### **4 Vocal skills**

In addition to building a verbal capability, the describer develops the vocal instrument with speech and oral interpretation fundamentals.

Allows audience to make their own judgement and interpret the events as they unfold.

Essentially a describer needs to:  
Pleasant voice with clear diction  
Easy to listen to  
Never speak over the actors

## **Time**

To provide AD of theatre describers see the show 3 times  
First in audience  
twice from booth to make notes – although there won't be any time to read from them once the play commences – the notes are simply there as a prompt  
Then confer on notes and provide live AD for 2 specified performances – one may be a matinee

In general describers see the performance 5 times!

Our Audio Describers describe 2 theatre productions per year – the dates for productions will be provided at the start of the year. There is plenty of advance notice given for describers to select the productions that suit their availability.