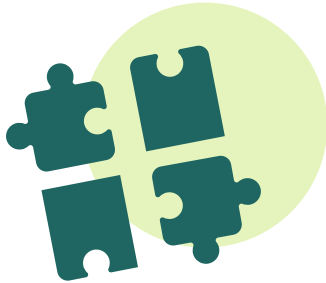# OpenCities

City of Broken Hill

Broken Hill City Council made the decision to put accessibility at the heart of their new website, and by focusing on high-level user experiences for all, they were able to see results that strengthened the culture of their staff and community.

The challenge

Broken Hill City Council is in the far west region of New South Wales. With an isolated location and a population 8 years older than the national average, the council knew that website accessibility was something they would need to work on as the Disability Inclusion Act was implemented.

Like many councils in NSW, Broken Hill City Council had to develop a 4-year action plan that would make their website accessible and inclusive to their entire community. As part of this plan, the executive leadership team created a monitoring group, designed to support the needs of people with disabilities.

After reviewing the council's website, the findings were clear. Broken Hill City Council needed a new site.

With a clear direction from the leadership team, Digital Officer Luke Dart and a small project team took on the assignment of launching a new council website. The new site would need to be innovative and sustainable, but the heart of the new site would be all about accessibility.

When searching for a new website platform, Dart and the team wanted something that would give them the accessibility features they needed and be easy for staff to use.

The solution

OpenCities provided an intuitive platform that was WCAG 2.0 compliant and had several included features that gave the council what it needed to:

- Provide content in different languages – There are 4 predominate languages in Broken Hill City Council that needed to be represented.

- Make certain that links are never broken with a broken link checker.

- Put mobile first, giving those who only have access to the internet through a mobile device the ability to get the information they need.

- Structure website content for accessibility and add image ALT tags, allowing text to speech solutions to work properly for residents who are visually impaired or blind.

With an older population, many of the staff members at Broken Hill City Council were related to, or personally connected to someone in the community who needed diversity, disability or inclusion services.

Their hearts were in their work, which helped them thrive during training exercises that focused on skills that would make their new website accessible.

Rather than migrate old website content to the new site, the team decided to journey map the services and re-examine the content they were offering to their community. In many cases, services were streamlined, and content was re-designed.
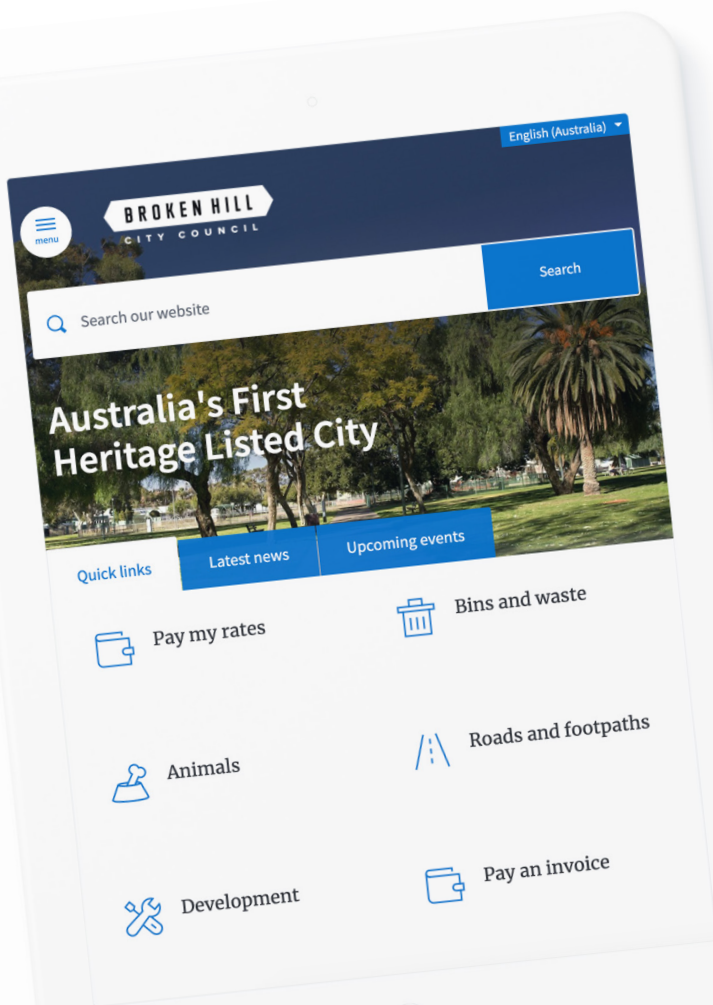
"When we focused on creating a high-level user experience, it removed the barriers to entry and access for all our users. We started to understand that when we built better online experiences, using the features in OpenCities, we covered everything, including accessibility."

Luke Dart, Digital Officer

The results

After great anticipation, and staff members waiting to provide new and better online services, Broken Hill City Council's website was launched, and the response has been overwhelming.

Colour contrast issues have been eliminated through staff training and changing primary colours from black and orange to a more accessible color palette of blue and white.

By using the OpenCities platform, with structured content, a local radio announcer, who is visually impaired, was able to use text to speech software to more easily receive and announce Broken Hill City Council news releases.

The monitoring group initiated by the executive leadership team has re-examined the new website to make sure that all accessibility and inclusion guidelines were being followed. Their findings clearly stated that the new site is easier for people with disabilities to navigate.

When considering the time staff previously spent helping residents with council services in person compared to the same services that are now offered online, Dart estimates the council has saved over $25,000.

To make sure that the new website remains accessible and provides the best user experience possible, Broken Hill City Council follows a website governance process that uses built-in workflows that make sure managers, or members of the communications team approve anything before it is published on their site when needed.

"We were grateful to find the OpenCities platform, which gave us the features to easily provide access and inclusion to all residents of Broken Hill City Council. Not only have we changed the way we provide services to the community, but we've shifted the way we think about accessibility in our council – putting it at the heart of everything we do."

Luke Dart, Digital Officer

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