

Access

Suzanne Bull, Attitude is Everything
Ono Dafedjaiye, Heart 'n Soul
Clare Thomas, Heart 'n Soul
Facilitated by David Micklem, BAC

David Micklem (DM) introduced the three speakers and the presentations they were about to give. DM said that the focus would be on practicality and also on looking at access as a positive thing that people want to engage with, rather than a necessity controlled by the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA).

Suzanne Bull (SB) started with a quote from Matt Fraser: “As a disabled performer I want to see every sort of body in the crowd. As a punter, I want to see every sort of body on the stage.” SB went on to talk about Attitude is Everything which is a project set up seven years ago with ACE funding to look at how the music industry can improve disabled and deaf people’s access to live music. It does this through a Charter of Best Practice and by doing mystery shopping, access audits and disability equality training. It also looks at encouraging festivals and events to employ deaf and disabled stewards. Attitude is Everything also runs its own club night in order to have first hand experience of what works best. SB explained that her work on large-scale events has been on music festivals including Glastonbury, Big Green Gathering, Reading and Leeds. They also work on the Liberty Festival in Trafalgar Square which is an outdoor festival that showcases the talents of deaf and disabled artists.

SB spoke about the common misconception that access refers only to physical access. Access also has to address the needs of visual impaired people, people who are hard of hearing, deaf people, people with learning difficulties and mental health problems.

Most large-scale events take minimal measures such as providing a viewing platform and an accessible temporary toilet. Outdoor events have to consider many, many other things such as the effect of the weather – flooding, no shelter, structures collapsing in the sun etc. – long distances to travel between attractions or from parking and negotiating large crowds. Think each feature through properly as well; if you provide designated viewing platforms for disabled audience members then it is essential to provide a route through the crowd to get to them. Event organisers need to communicate externally to their audience, but also internally, so that everyone working on the event is aware of the access issues and measures that have been taken. When you get the access right and when you market your event well, you will see a significant growth in numbers. Reading Festival has seen a 40% growth in disabled attendees each year.

It is important to think sensitively about non-wheelchair users, who make up 97% of the disabled community. Stewards are sometimes found telling people that they don’t “look disabled”. SB then showed another quote from a visually impaired person, who had problems being in the crowd, but found it hard to explain to the stewards that they should be let onto the viewing platform. Some disabled people

don't want to be on a viewing platform, because it separate them from the rest of the crowd. It is important that, rather than making arbitrary decisions about where access points should be sited, disabled people are asked what would work for them.

SB then talked about a few of her own experiences at large-scale outdoor events as a wheelchair using audience member. At *The Sultan's Elephant*, SB viewed the elephant while it was resting. The crowds were thinner, she had a great view and she felt safe. She thought about going to view it in the crowds, when it was busier and moving, but decided it might not be a good experience. SB goes every year to Notting Hill Carnival as a local resident. She always goes to the same place where she knows there is space and that there will be lots of police around. She leaves early and doesn't go wandering. However, she questions whether this is boring and whether she should have to feel like she has to go home early? This year she tried moving around a bit more, but it was hard work and eventually the police had to help to clear a path. A five minute walk took about 20 minutes.

Is there a solution to making large-scale events more accessible for everyone? This year, the Liberty Festival was radically altered to see if a significant difference could be made to people's experience. It was an experiment. Previously there had been one main stage, like at a music gig, and a smaller arts tent. It was quite boring and it meant that only deaf and disabled artists who were used to performing on a large stage could perform.

This year, Trafalgar Square was split into different zones, including comedy and cabaret, street arts, music and dance, carnival and so on. Some performances were in tents, some facing the crowd and some in amongst the crowd. Attention was focused on training all crew and stewards to assist audience members. In the training session they worked on case studies so that everyone was prepared for what they might be called on to do. The organisers were prepared for positive and negative feedback because it was an experiment and there were quite a lot of changes.

Staff were trained to help people make the most of the festival. When looking at large-scale events, you need to think about different types of interpretation and guiding people to it – BSL, palantype and audio description. You need to think carefully about when things are programmed and provide lots of information in lots of different formats.

Careful programming is the most accommodating way of providing access to all. Repeated performances and continued screenings throughout the course of an event provide opportunities for people to move around the site and to see things in their own time. It is important to create flexible viewing areas, where chairs and tables can be rearranged to accommodate people whatever their access needs. Providing comprehensive information in all formats means that people are aware not only of the programme but of the facilities available to them.

It is important that event organisers are creative when it comes to planning for access. If interpreters are provided at an event, they should be people who are interested in performance and excited about it as they can add a lot to the interpretation. Give them information about the programme in advance of the event so that they can convey the whole atmosphere.

A wish-list for a totally accessible festival would include: mobility bus, drop-off and pick-up point, information areas, trained stewards some who are interpreters, information in large text, Braille and tape format, palantype, accessible toilets and

changing area with hoist, induction loops, wheelchair loan service, charging point for power wheelchairs, assistance dogs' area, catering and lifts.

SB finished by saying that although it sounds overwhelming, it is important to start to make the changes, not because of the DDA or because ACE require you to, but because you want to attract a truly diverse audience and put on new talent. Do it because it is an opportunity to work with another artistic process that takes creativity and lateral thinking. Begin by having an access audit and implement provision bit by bit, avoiding cutting corners at all costs. Make sure all your staff have disability equality training and work with deaf and disabled artists always.

Julian Rudd (ISAN) asked what SB thought about the low attendance at the access breakout session.

SB replied that, although it is disappointing, it isn't unusual and in the music industry, the attendance would probably have been even lower and people would be saying: "just tell us what we have to do – what's the bottom line".

DM moved the session on, handing over to Clare Thomas (CT) and Ono Dafedjaiye (OD) to talk about marketing and communications.

CT said that, as with Artichoke, Heart 'n Soul sees artists and audiences as having equal importance. Heart 'n Soul puts learning disability culture at the heart of everything they do, always striving for quality, integrity and diversity.

Heart 'n Soul took part in a programme called Not for the Likes of You which looked at organisations which had been successful in changing their message to reach a more diverse audience. The findings of the programme are available on the ACE website. What Heart 'n Soul took from the experience was that in order to reach a particular audience you need to model that on the inside of your organisation. This means that Heart 'n Soul now work not only with disabled artists, but also include disabled people in every aspect of the work, including marketing. OD talked about how Heart 'n Soul have done this to empower a group of young people.

Dealing with practical concerns, brings in a range of audiences by taking away the barriers to accessibility. Heart 'n Soul developed the team which looks after the audience and is the first point of contact. They partnered people with learning disabilities with front of house professionals so they could learn the skills needed for the job.

Another development was around the club nights for young people. This included giving more consideration to the people who often accompany young people such as carers and drivers. They went on to provide an environment where these people feel comfortable and catered for. This also gives the young people some space away from their carer. By looking after the carers, you can ensure that they will feel more motivated to bring the young people at whom the night is intended.

Other useful things to consider include:

- Create an access map of the venue;
- Provide parking attendants;
- Always consider public transport and parking carefully;
- Provide clear signage inside and outside;
- Provide clean and accessible toilets;
- Provide food options for all and let people know this in advance;
- Fundraise in order to subsidise ticket prices.

CT went on to say that “features can be benefits”. In marketing, people are often told to sell the benefits and concentrate on how the event might make you feel or change your life, rather than the specific features. While this is still valid, features can be benefits and not knowing about the features may stop many people coming.

It is important to create meaningful roles for people with disabilities:

- work with disabled audiences;
- employ disabled individuals;
- consult them at all times;
- create disabled steering committees.

Give disabled people ownership of the projects. Heart ‘n Soul is currently training people to be interviewers and to make and edit video recordings, so they can create their own content and disseminate it through their own networks and with their own language.

When evaluating, involve people in the process! Evaluation should be about getting feedback in ways that are fun and accessible. For example, interviewing them in front of a camera in the style of a chat show can encourage audiences to share their thoughts in a unique way on a particular performance/event.

Involve people in the development of projects. Lift is a pioneering organisation in doing just this. The architects have consulted disabled people in the building of *The Lift*. As a result their needs have been taken into consideration from the outset of the project and Lift has, in turn, developed a future audience for events in the new space.

Never forget that marketing is about establishing relationships.

- Be creative with your access – create a relaxing environment where people are made to feel comfortable;
- Use easy words, or pictures, to describe activities;
- Create something that does not put off non-disabled users but is accessible to all;
- Work to sell your event to distinct audiences. Visit day centres – build relationships with people and help encourage them to attend;
- Make phone calls and arrange visits to schools;
- Arrange open days;
- Contact disabled organisations;
- Target parents, carers and professionals as well as the disabled people.

CT added that disabled audiences are still quite reliant on print marketing rather than web or email based marketing. Although this is slowly changing, it is important to bear it in mind at present if you are hoping to reach a disabled audience. Heart ‘n Soul write letters and give as much information as possible so people know that the event is for them.

Ticket bookings can be one of the biggest barriers to people accessing arts events, as not all disabled people have cards or even bank accounts to make payments from and so cannot make advance bookings. To overcome this, and so as not to restrict anyone from attending, make a proportion of your tickets available purely on the night so that those not able to book in advance can still attend and not risk tickets being sold out. Provide a separate queue for people who have booked in advance as a means of encouraging them to continue doing so. This way you will also be able to gauge audience numbers before the event takes place.

Create an access map of the venue and clear programme for the event, as well as flyers for future events to distribute to people during the event. This way people who

cannot access the internet or visit the venue in passing are aware of future performances and know how to book for them.

CT finished by saying that it is important to work together. Heart 'n Soul sometimes help other organisations to be more accessible.

For further information on creating a diverse audience, please contact Heart 'n Soul <http://www.heartnsoul.co.uk/>

For a charter of best practice and information on how to make changes to your practice visit www.attitudeiseverything.org.uk