Re-imagine

Improving access to the arts, galleries and museums

for people with learning disabilities


Lemos & Crane
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Executive Summary

This paper forms a part of a large body of work by Lemos&Crane on tackling isolation, encouraging social and cultural engagement and promoting positive social networks for adults with learning disabilities living in the community. As well as empowering people against vulnerability to loneliness and cruelty, engagement with the arts, museums and galleries creates opportunities to enjoy new experiences, develop positive social networks, express yourself in a new and meaningful way, broaden experience and ignite imagination. These are formative and important experiences for many people – from which people with learning disabilities should not be excluded.

Much more could be done, however, by arts organisations, museums and galleries – as well as in specialist disability and learning disability arts sectors – to improve access and engagement of adults with learning disabilities in the arts and museums. Almost all adults with learning disabilities have contact with adult social care support services. Adult social care staff and organisations could do more to support adults with learning disabilities to engage with the arts, museums or galleries as part of person-centred planning, support planning, care planning or resettlement.

Lemos&Crane were commissioned by City Bridge Trust to write a scoping paper to understand the extent and nature of activities and approaches to improving access for people with learning disabilities to the arts, galleries and museums in London, as well as to identify gaps and suggest recommendations for practice as well as policy. This paper outlines preliminary findings.

The results from our improving access to arts, museums and galleries call for good practice.

We distributed an email questionnaire seeking examples of good practice to arts organisations, galleries and museums across London and learning disability specialists from London and across the UK. 81 organisations responded – 47 with either a completed survey or some information about their work and 34 to say that although they had no relevant projects to share, they were keen to know more about the project, remain in touch and receive updates as the project develops.

The picture from mainstream arts organisations, museums and galleries

Twenty six mainstream arts organisations, galleries or museums responded to our survey. Of these, 14 had some form of current or ongoing activity for people with a learning disability. For these purposes, general compliance with equality legislation was excluded. All the activities or projects described below refer to additional or complementary activities in addition to the everyday activities of the organisation. Twelve organisations had no current or ongoing practice or activities for people with a learning disability. Of these, eight had never had any activities for people with learning disabilities and four had previously run a project or activity but this had come to an end.

Performing arts organisations seemed to be more responsive to the needs and aspirations of people with learning disabilities (especially children) than most museums and galleries. There is perhaps an underlying uncertainty about the nature of learning disability and how people with a learning disability might best interact with museums and galleries.
Partnerships
Among all responses there were 25 successful projects born of partnerships between mainstream arts organisations or venues and either specialist arts organisations or learning disability organisations outside of the arts. Partnerships included:

- Providing advice and expertise on improving access
- identifying and involving participants for projects and programmes, and
- mainstream organisations providing venues and a platform for companies of artists with a learning disability.

Projects that were regular or continuing in mainstream organisations were typically access and learning activities for children with learning disabilities (mostly organised in conjunction with special schools or SEN staff and often as part of a larger schools programme), whereas the self-contained and shorter-term exceptional projects were more typically for adults. There were proportionately more projects for children and young people than adults. Of the 14 arts organisations with ongoing or current activities for people with a learning disability, five projects were aimed primarily at children with a learning disability, two were specifically for adults, two were for young people (18-25) and five were for people of all ages.

Obstacles
Mainstream arts organisations did not seem always to have a clear framework of good practice for improving access for people with a learning disability. This was perhaps the consequence of widespread uncertainty and anxiety among those with little personal or professional experience of people with learning disabilities.

Evaluation was a frequent concern among respondents. This was usually aired in the context of funding applications (often for example for an ongoing project currently running on three year funding cycles). Concerns around how best to define, measure and communicate the impact of an activity for participants were common.

There were some logistical and other barriers to meeting the needs of adults with a learning disability, including the need to stay in close and continuous contact with participants and their families or carers to ensure that participants continued to attend, as well as difficulty in recruiting new people to an activity or organisation. Representatives (primarily from specialist arts organisations) spoke of having the same group of participants for years and having difficulty getting in touch with new potential members. Once people with learning disabilities move away from being supported by children’s services towards adult social care there is a less structured framework for support. While this brings benefits in terms of independence and personalisation, it means there are fewer intermediaries and therefore getting and keeping in touch can prove more difficult.

The picture from specialist learning disability arts organisations
Twelve responding organisations were specialist arts organisations working with people with learning disabilities.

- Four supported professional artists with a learning disability or promote disability arts to mainstream organisations
- Four supported people to visit arts organisations, museums and galleries or provided arts education
- Two encouraged participants to produce visual arts or crafts
- One provided specialist performances
- One was a freelance campaigner
- One was a measurement, management and assessment tool for practitioners in the arts
- One was an inclusive (mixed ability) theatre company.¹

Most frequent activities by organisations in this group were:

- supporting professional artists with a learning disability
- promoting engagement activities with mainstream arts, museums and galleries
- supporting people with a learning disability to produce art themselves
- providing a creative, social activity or group.

Specialist arts organisations had a greater tendency towards smaller, longer-term groups of participants taking part in activities whereas mainstream arts organisations more often did one-off programmes reaching larger numbers of people. In general the specialist arts organisations who responded primarily worked with adults – for whom fewer opportunities were available from mainstream arts organisations.

**Partnerships**

Mainstream arts organisations and museums were more likely to partner with learning disability specialists outside the arts than with specialist arts organisations. These partnerships were often a source of expertise in reaching, engaging and meeting the needs of people with a learning disability. There were also good examples of specialist arts organisations forming partnerships with mainstream arts organisations. In some cases these relationships developed into co-creative partnerships in which the work of artists with a learning disability informed the work of the mainstream organisation and vice versa. Our responses included eleven partnerships between a specialist and a mainstream arts organisation.

**Obstacles**

Barriers mentioned by specialist arts organisations included marketing, recruiting new people to membership, paying artists for their work and the practicalities of getting people to the activities and retaining consistent contact with them. Practical challenges such as transport to venues and maintaining contact with members were also mentioned. This difficulty was also experienced by mainstream organisations and is more evident in projects for adults than children, for whom the structure and resources of special schools or SEN support are still available.

¹ This includes organisations with more than one activity
The picture from learning disability organisations outside the arts

Seven responses came from learning disability specialist organisations working outside the arts, such as advocacy groups, charities and supported living organisations. These organisations commonly worked in partnership with mainstream arts organisations, museums and galleries, providing either expertise on topics such as accessibility and easyread material or participants for projects. Some of these organisations were also supporting people to attend arts activities, museums and galleries. Emphasis among these organisations was typically on advocacy and improving service users’ level of choice and meaningful activity.

The need for a wider choice for people with a learning disability was evident in the responses of organisations supporting people with a learning disability. For learning disability specialists outside the arts, engagement in arts activities or visiting museums and galleries was often undertaken with a view to offering people with a learning disability the same choice over how they spend their time as that offered to everyone else.

The range of activities

**Children, schools and young people:** Of our respondents, five mainstream arts organisations, museums or galleries described projects working for young people with a learning disability. Three organisations were specialist arts organisations for people with a learning disability.

**Engagement activities for people with learning disabilities:** These activities were more equally shared by mainstream arts organisations and specialist arts organisations, with five mainstream organisations describing engagement activities, four were activities by a specialist arts organisation and three by non-arts organisations supporting people with learning disabilities. Some of the specialist organisations’ activities fell entirely under this heading.

**Access to collections, events and venues:** Activities focused on improving access to collections, events and venues were either mainstream organisations working to improve their own accessibility (three organisations), specialist learning disability organisations arranging visits to museums, galleries or arts venues for their service users (three organisations) or organisations providing accessibility training for venues and event organisers in the mainstream arts, museums and galleries sector. Four learning disability organisations outside the arts also worked to improve access through providing expertise on accessibility or supporting service users to attend arts venues and events.

**Supporting professional artists:** Activities supporting and promoting professional artists with a learning disability were most commonly provided by specialist arts organisations. Organisations supporting artists with a learning disability produced a wide variety of rich, sometimes challenging, high quality art.

**Studio/space:** Four respondents supported artists by providing studio spaces for them to develop their craft. Studio spaces were provided by mainstream arts venues working in partnership, primarily with adult social care and non arts learning disability specialists.

**Club nights:** Two respondents provided club nights and discos for people with learning disabilities. One was a mainstream arts organisation and the other a specialist learning disability organisation outside the
arts. Club nights and discos were seen by these organisations as a rite of passage for many young people, from which people with learning disabilities are often excluded.

**EasyRead:** Three respondents provided EasyRead services as part of their services. Of these, two were learning disability specialists working in conjunction with a mainstream organisation.

**Relaxed performances:** Three respondents included relaxed performances among their activities. These were often partnerships between theatre companies and organisations supporting people with learning disabilities or specialist learning disability arts organisations. We also heard from specialist theatre organisations whose work in its entirety might be described as relaxed performances.

**Conclusions**

1. **Excellence of specialist organisations**
   There is a wide range of specialist learning disability and disability arts organisations. These form a rich and diverse sector producing extraordinary quality work with people with learning disabilities as both artists and audience members.

2. **Islands of excellence among mainstream arts organisations**
   Among mainstream organisations there are examples of leading lights. These organisations have ongoing or recurring projects or a range of promotional and other activities for people with learning disabilities to access activities, exhibitions and performances.

3. **Enthusiasm and interest on the side of both supply and demand**
   There is an undercurrent of enthusiasm and the general sense that organisations want to do more to meet the needs of people with a learning disability. This is matched by enthusiasm and interest on the demand side; people with learning disabilities and those who support them are enthusiastic about opportunities to participate in the arts, museums and galleries.

4. **A patchy landscape**
   Across the board there are still too few dedicated activities, projects or programmes for people with learning disabilities across mainstream arts organisations, museums and galleries as audience members, artists, visitors and contributors.

5. **More for children than adults**
   Within a small amount of provision overall children and young people with learning disabilities are generally better served than adults. Programmes for adults are more likely to be shorter term one off projects, and difficulties around marketing to potential participants, recruiting new members and sustaining contact are all notable.

6. **No bridging network**
   Organisations (particularly mainstream organisations) experience difficulty making connections with the learning disability community in terms of exchanging information and advertising. The significance of support workers and key supporters in getting people to events and activities and supporting them to find out about events was apparent. Equally, the dedicated learning disability arts sector is vibrant and
diverse but much more can be done in terms of its connections and interactions with the mainstream arts sector.

Towards a framework for good practice

Despite islands of excellence in both mainstream and specialist arts organisations, many arts organisations need to do more across the board. Given the level of enthusiasm and interest in doing more, and the lack of clarity about what is required, a policy framework for good practice needs to be developed and disseminated. Funders should also do more to ensure compliance with the emerging policy framework as a condition of their funding. This might include:

1. Build a **network of mainstream and specialist arts, adult social care and supported housing organisations** with an interest in and commitment to increasing opportunities for people with learning disabilities to get involved in the arts at all levels in all ways.
2. Build stronger, more enduring **partnerships between specialist and mainstream arts organisations**.
3. Support **artists with learning disabilities** to find spaces to work, make new work, establish collaborations and reach a wider audience.
4. **Audience development** to ensure that people with learning disabilities are better informed about arts events, either by artists with learning disabilities or others.
5. **Improving access** across the board including marketing and publicity, easy booking online and face to face, signage, wayfinding, accessible texts in programmes and catalogues, relaxed performances.
6. Improve the **awareness of staff**, particularly front of house and gallery assistants.
7. Increase **employment opportunities for people with learning disabilities** in arts organisations, museums and galleries.
Introduction

'We contend our operation as a theatre company is beyond expectation of possibility. Our record of success, or even existence, could not have been dreamt of in the recent past.'

Back to Back Theatre

This paper forms a part of a large body of work by Lemos&Crane undertaken over several years with a view to tackling isolation, encouraging social and cultural engagement and promoting positive social networks for adults with learning disabilities living in the community. Research in 2012 by Lemos&Crane (Loneliness and Cruelty: People with learning disabilities and their experience of harassment, abuse and related crime in the community), found that loneliness, isolation and unfamiliarity with contemporary lifestyles often made adults living independently in the community vulnerable to cruelty or exploitation. The social lives of adults with learning disabilities too often revolve around day centres, pubs, cafes and sitting at home on the internet or watching television. Access to more meaningful social lives - including faith communities and sports clubs as well as the arts, museums and galleries - are essential components in building resilience, wellbeing and social networks which are both empowering and protective. Understanding the world they live in as well as actively and creatively engaging with it is ultimately one of the most important forms of self-protection. Because people are isolated or inexperienced they may be too eager or willing to spend time with other people who have designs on exploitation (financial, sexual or otherwise) or cruelty. People with learning disabilities all too easily find out the benefits of good friends and the risks of bad friends, but often too late to prevent damage being done.

Aside from empowering people against vulnerability to loneliness and cruelty, access to and engagement with the arts, museums and galleries are opportunities to enjoy new experiences, express yourself in a new and meaningful way, broaden experience and ignite imagination. These are significant, sometimes even formative experiences for many people – from which adults with learning disabilities should not be excluded.

Despite longstanding commitments to access, participation, learning, equality and diversity, museums, galleries and arts venues are not currently required by funders or policy makers specifically to promote access for people with intellectual disabilities as they are in relation to other groups. Learning disability falls within the requirements of equality and disability legislation and regulations, but the distinctive needs or wishes of people with a learning disability are often not recognised or met despite these general provisions. Artists, venues and arts organisations are increasingly aware of the need to do more. To coincide with the Paralympics in 2012, Arts Council England funded a large programme of arts commissions by disabled artists, Unlimited, (which continues post-Olympics); however the focus was principally on a small group of well-established artists with physical disabilities. Recent years have seen the growth of a dedicated specialist learning disability arts sector which is small but vibrant. These excellent organisations aim in part to fill the gap in mainstream provision by providing rich and diverse cultural and learning activities for – and often by - adults with learning disabilities. Many of these organisations also seek to challenge outdated stereotypes and stigmas of learning disability. These

2 Back to Back Theatre Year in Review: 2013 page 3
dedicated and creative organisations exist alongside mainstream arts, galleries and museums. While integration and exchange between the two is growing it is not yet sufficiently common. A ubiquitous presence of activities for people with learning disabilities in all mainstream arts organisations, galleries and museums is still some way away.

Almost all adults with learning disabilities are in touch with adult social care or supported housing services. A great deal more could be done by support workers and carers from these services to encourage adults with learning disabilities to engage with the arts, museums or galleries as part of person-centred planning, support planning, care planning or resettlement.

A breakfast seminar was convened by the City Bridge Trust in December 2013 attended by representatives from the British Museum, the V&A, the Barbican and the London International Festival of Theatre. As well as City Bridge Trust, representatives from the Paul Hamlyn Trust, Esmee Fairbairn Foundation and the Rayne Foundation were also present. From the disability arts world, representatives attended from Shape Arts, Heart n Soul and Magpie Dance. At the seminar all agreed that much more needed to be done to improve access for adults with learning disabilities. For a start, there was no clear picture of what was going on currently, however limited or small scale.

As a first step, Lemos&Crane were asked to produce a scoping paper to understand the extent and nature of activities and approaches to improving access for people with learning disabilities to the arts, galleries and museums in London, as well as to identify gaps and suggest next steps for practice as well as policy. This paper outlines our preliminary findings. It is intended to build a foundation for practical steps to improve access and participation in arts organisations, museums and galleries for people with learning disabilities so that they might be contributors to, and beneficiaries from the wealth of cultural, social, intellectual and creative benefits that arts organisations have to offer. The responses to our call for good practice largely detailed projects specifically for groups of people with learning disabilities which happen outside of the everyday public activities of the organisation. However, improved access to everyday public events, exhibitions and collections for individual visitors or unaccompanied groups is as fundamental a part of improving access to the arts, museums and galleries for people with learning disabilities. Similarly, staff training and recruitment and the professional development of artists with a learning disability is also crucial. This is reflected in this paper. We refer to ‘mainstream’ arts organisations and ‘specialist’ learning disability or disability arts organisations. While this typology is far from satisfactory as many specialist organisations either are or aspire to be mainstream, some distinction was necessary for the purposes of analysis in this paper.
Camden Art Centre Get the Message Family Day. Image: Pablo Antoli
Responses from call for good practice.

We distributed an email questionnaire seeking examples of good practice to organisations, galleries and museums across London and learning disability specialists from London and across the UK. Eighty one people responded – 47 with either a completed survey or information about their work and 34 to say that although they had no relevant projects to share they were keen to remain in touch and receive updates as this work developed. In particular they were keen to receive resources developed and disseminated from the project. The majority of those that responded in full – 34 out of 47 - were from organisations in London.

Thirty two of the forty seven responding organisations said they would be interested in developing good practice in improving access to the arts for people with learning disabilities. Over half of the 47 survey responses came from mainstream arts organisations, museums or galleries, which are obviously far greater in number than specialist organisations.

Types of organisation responding to our call for good practice

![Pie chart showing the distribution of organisations responding to the call for good practice.]

- LD arts & museums specialist 26%
- LD support/advice/advocacy/living 15%
- Disability arts specialist 4%
- Arts org/museum 55%
The picture from mainstream arts organisations, museums and galleries

**Activities**

Of the 26 mainstream arts organisations, museums or galleries 14 (54%) had current or ongoing activities for people with a learning disability – including a particular, self-contained project or an embedded, ongoing part of outreach or education work. For these purposes, general compliance with equality legislation was excluded. All the activities or projects described below refer to additional or complementary activities run in addition to the everyday activities of the organisation. Twelve organisations had no current or ongoing practice/activities for people with a learning disability. Of these, eight had never had any activities for people with learning disabilities and four had previously run a project or activity which was now at an end.

Responses were disproportionately from performing arts organisations and museums and galleries were underrepresented among respondents. Six museums responded, of which four had a project or activity. Three galleries responded, of which one had an impressive range of activities for people with a learning disability. One had a recently completed project for adults with learning disabilities. The third had little provision for visitors with a learning disability.

On the basis of this small unrepresentative sample performing arts organisations seemed generally more responsive to the needs and aspirations of people with learning disabilities (especially children). For many people, there is perhaps an underlying uncertainty about the nature of various learning disabilities and how people with a learning disability might interact with museums and galleries. This
suggests the need to develop, test and learn from innovative approaches in museums and galleries as well as across the board in other arts organisations.

**Aspirations**
Mainstream arts organisations which responded typically aspired to improve their accessibility in order to welcome a wider range of visitors to their collections, events and activities. One mainstream organisation stated their aspiration was promoting work by artists with learning disabilities through their partnership with a specialist organisation. Two mainstream organisations explicitly mentioned that they aimed to challenge preconceptions of learning disability.

> ‘We would like to increase access to people with learning difficulties, through awareness of content on the website, information in the gallery and the support of the visitor experience assistants.’

- Mainstream gallery collection and venue

**Partnerships**

> ‘The aim of the project was to work cooperatively with a number of organisations already engaged with adults with learning disabilities.’

- Mainstream gallery and museum

Among all responses there were 25 successful projects born of partnerships between mainstream arts organisations or venues and either specialist arts organisations or learning disability organisations outside of the arts.\(^3\) Partnerships included:

- providing advice and expertise on improving access
- identifying and involving participants for projects and programmes and
- mainstream organisations providing venues and a platform for companies of artists with a learning disability.

In some instances partnerships developed into symbiotic creative developments for artists. One mainstream organisation had established a working group among peers to share learning and experience on improving access for people with learning disabilities.

> ‘What we feel is particularly important is the degree of control that the participating organisations had from the very outset, deciding the form that they wanted the project to take not only in general terms but also in detail, reflecting the particular needs of the individuals they were working with. But the greatest learning that took place for us was in fact being directly involved with the workshops. We also felt that one of the reasons for the project’s success was the mixing of the works produced by the participants with the major artworks.’

- Mainstream gallery and museum

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\(^3\) This does not include instances of learning disability organisations outside of the arts supporting adults with learning disabilities to access, attend and engage with arts activities and events provided by mainstream or specialist arts organisations.
Among mainstream organisations regular or continuing projects were more typically part of access and learning activities for children with learning disabilities (mostly organised through special schools or SEN staff) whereas the self-contained and shorter-term exceptional projects were more likely to be for adults. Fourteen organisations had ongoing activities, of which seven were aimed primarily at children or young adults and two were specifically for adults.

As noted, projects and activities for adults were often undertaken in partnership with other organisations, many of them non-arts organisations. Of five arts organisations with activities for adults (three of which were past activities), three were in conjunction with a learning disability support organisation and two with a specialist learning disability arts organisation. This might reflect the types of activities which feature in the organisation’s mainstream programmes, such as education and learning, principally for school children. At least one of the ‘all ages’ projects was an SEN children’s programme with no upper age limit, accessible to adult social care organisations but part of learning and education programme.

Participants
Of the 14 arts organisations with ongoing or current activities for people with a learning disability, five projects (36%) were aimed primarily at children with a learning disability, two were specifically for adults, (14%), two were for young people (18-25) and five were for people of all ages (36%). Of the four organisations that had run and completed special projects in the past for people with a learning disability, three of those were for adults and one was for children.
Cultural access

Underpinning practical and logistical measures to improve access to the arts, museums and galleries is a commitment to cultural and social access. The aspiration is that people with learning disabilities – as much as any group who do not often experience the arts, museums or galleries – should feel comfortable in those spaces and enjoy an equal sense of ownership over the environment. Activities to promote being a participant and contributor to cultural activities – rather than just a passive observer, and that embrace the diversity of audiences make important statements and signals towards cultural and social accessibility of the arts.

Mentoring and role models can be a particularly effective and inclusive way of promoting cultural and social access to the arts, museums and galleries. Artists with a learning disability sharing their experiences and expertise with young people with a learning disability, or artists with and without a learning disability working collaboratively can provide peer support and encouragement as well as blurring the distinction between one category of audience or artist – those with learning disabilities - and another – those without. This has the potential, aside from producing interesting and engaging art, to bring so-called ‘outsider’ artists and audiences very much more in to the mainstream.

Staff recruitment and training

Staff – and especially front of house staff - working in a mainstream arts organisation play a significant role in overall accessibility. Training is therefore essential in making visitors with learning disabilities (or any group who do not often visit arts organisations, museums or galleries) feel welcome and ensuring the experience is positive. Some members of staff might feel hesitant about engaging with visitors with a disability for fear of doing something inappropriate or wrong. Improving confidence, awareness and understanding would therefore go some way towards making people feel welcome and involved. Many learning disability advocacy organisations provide peer training and support for organisations looking to improve staff awareness of learning disability. For those organisations for whom learning disability is not (explicitly) part of their day-to-day work, the benefits of such training would be considerable. One of our survey respondents was a learning disability specialist organisation which had devised an award scheme for learning disability accessibility for arts and heritage organisations. Such an approach would, for some organisations, be a valuable moment of self-reflection and appraisal which, in conjunction with staff training, would encourage good practice across the organisation.

In addition to staff training, diversity among staff is hugely significant both in terms of accessibility of that organisation and the experience of adults with learning disabilities more generally. It is also a welcoming inclusive signal to all visitors and an implied statement of commitment to the goal of equality. Appointing staff with disabilities, including learning disabilities, would improve staff awareness and confidence in meeting the needs of a diverse audience as well as projecting a more up-to-date, relevant image and institutional identity – both to the learning disability community and the wider public – that meaningful employment in the arts is possible for people with learning disabilities. More generally, there are far too few role models with learning disabilities across the arts (and generally in the world of work). Employing people with a learning disability would address this, as well as supporting professional artists with a learning disability.
Obstacles
Mainstream arts organisations did not always have a clear definition of good practice in improving access for people with a learning disability. Ten of the 34 organisations (29%) who got in touch expressing a keen interest in this work and asking to be kept informed were mainstream arts organisations and museums (in addition 13 specialist learning disability services outside the arts also wanted to be kept posted). The following comment reflects the views of many working in mainstream arts organisations.

“We would be very interested in learning more about what can be done to ensure our building and work continues to be accessible for a wider range of people and their individual needs as well as looking to cultivate new relationships and networking groups so we can promote the work we produce and the variety of assisted performances to an audience who may wish to experience this.”

- Mainstream theatre

Some responses suggest a degree of confusion about people with learning disabilities and their needs and potential, what could be defined as good practice as well as the potential benefits of the arts and creativity to people with learning disabilities. This was perhaps the consequence of widespread uncertainty and anxiety among those with little personal or professional experience of people with learning disabilities.

Evaluation was important for respondents, particularly in the context of funding applications (often for example for an ongoing project on a three year funding cycle). Two mainstream arts organisations had put considerable work into exploring how an informative and compelling evaluation might be achieved for projects working with people with learning disabilities.

“We have been developing the ways in which we can evaluate the impact for participants. This presents a challenge, as many participants aren’t able to express themselves verbally, so we rely on the feedback of teachers and parents, and many of the outcomes can be very subtle changes that are difficult to quantify. We haven’t been able to find a good existing model to follow.”

- Mainstream arts venue and gallery

There were some logistical and other barriers to meeting the needs of adults with a learning disability. These included the need to stay in close and continuous contact with participants and their families or carers to ensure regular attendance, as well as difficulty in reaching and recruiting new people to an activity or organisation – representatives (primarily from specialist arts organisations) spoke of having the same group of participants for years and reported difficulty reaching new potential members.

A brief review of websites of the largest arts organisations in London was undertaken. These contained few, if any, references to the needs and aspirations of people with learning disabilities or activities to respond to these needs and aspirations.
Implications of funding structures

Funding for projects that do not fall within schools and learning activities such as community projects and work for adults with learning disabilities is often received from trusts and foundations project by project. In her study of museum and gallery community projects, Dr Bernadette Lynch noted that this funding structure can serve to isolate such projects from the mainstream activities of the organisation rather than to bring them – and their participants – into its day-to-day working:

‘despite presenting numerous examples of ground-breaking, innovative practice, the funding invested in public engagement and participation in the UK’s museums and galleries has not significantly succeeded in shifting the work from the margins to the core of many of these organisations. In fact [...] it has curiously done the opposite. By providing funding streams outside of core budgets, it appears to have helped to keep the work on the organisations’ peripheries’.4

The project-based approach to funding inclusion of people with learning disabilities in the activities of arts organisations, museums and galleries might lead to a lack of support for those who visit organisations by themselves or in unaccompanied groups. This underlines the need to ensure accessibility is championed throughout the whole organisation and across the breadth its activities – its projects and programmes, staffing and employment and ordinary day to day working.

Marketing

Mainstream arts organisations have well established approaches to marketing events and other activities however their promotions rarely explicitly sought to reach out to, elicit the interest or excite the imagination of potential artists or audiences with learning disabilities. Sharing information about activities on relevant mailing lists, websites and via social media was all more readily and comprehensively undertaken by specialist learning disability arts organisations, though they’re relatively much smaller. Reaching people with learning disabilities would almost certainly require communicating with trusted intermediaries such as families, carers and organisations providing support, as well as reaching out directly to individuals as potential audience members or participants.

4 Dr Bernadette Lynch Whose Cake is it Anyway? Paul Hamlyn Foundation 2011 p.5
Corali: *Empty Theatre Dream*, Image: Andy Hood, Performer - Housni Hassan
The picture from specialist learning disability arts organisations

‘[We aim] to challenge preconceptions about art practice, art education and learning disability through the visible presence of people with learning disabilities, standing shoulder to shoulder with non-learning disabled artists in the contemporary art sphere. Success is confident, autonomous artists who have an artistic profile supported by the right level of resources and equality of opportunity to access arts and culture.’

- Specialist learning disability arts organisation

Twelve organisations which responded were specialist arts organisations working specifically with people with learning disabilities.

- Four supported professional artists with a learning disability or promote disability arts to mainstream organisations
- Four supported people to visit arts organisations, museums and galleries or provided arts education
- Two encouraged participants to produce visual arts or crafts
- One provided specialist performances
- One was a freelance campaigner
- One was a measurement, management and assessment tool for practitioners in the arts
- One was an inclusive (mixed ability) theatre company.⁵

Activities

Most frequent activities by these respondents were those supporting professional artists with a learning disability, promoting engagement activities with mainstream arts, museums and galleries, supporting people with a learning disability to produce art themselves and providing a creative, social activity or group.

Specialist arts organisations tended towards working with smaller, longer-term groups of participants, whereas mainstream arts organisations tended to do one-off programmes reaching larger numbers of people. An exception was specialist arts organisations encouraging and supporting attendance at mainstream events by people with learning disabilities and those who undertook performances for people with learning disabilities. Specialist organisations were typically able to include a larger number of people in these types of activities.

Numbers of participants ranged from companies of artists and projects involving 10-20 people with learning disabilities and larger projects (typically events at which people with learning disabilities formed the audience) for up to 100 people or more. Those organisations with more than one programme of activities and performances reached up to 120 a year. The typical number was 100 per year for these larger (typically touring) organisations.

‘A group of skilled, unique artists including adults with learning disabilities who produce high quality, honest theatre that challenges prejudice towards their communities. The group meet

⁵ This includes organisations with more than one activity
regularly to build skills in a range of art forms, and perform to regular theatre goers, members of their communities and unsuspecting passers-by across London and beyond. Currently there are around 16 members, nine of whom have a learning disability.’

- Specialist learning disability theatre ensemble

Visual and performing arts were better represented in this group than galleries and museums - although some organisations promoted museum-based activities primarily through supporting people to attend. However there were fewer ongoing or active projects involving museums and galleries than performing and visual arts among respondents.

‘Access, visibility and leadership roles for artists with learning disabilities within contemporary art galleries and museums has been integral to our work over the past 13 years. We create high quality resources, access and opportunities for 12 artists with learning disabilities.’

- Specialist learning disability arts engagement organisation

Participants
The specialist arts organisations which responded primarily worked with adults, for whom fewer opportunities were available from mainstream arts organisations. Seven of the activities listed by the specialist arts organisations were for adults with a learning disability. Three were directed towards people of all ages with a learning disability.

‘By taking part in the programme individuals: reduce social isolation, report an increased sense of belonging, increase their engagement with the arts and adult education and increase their physical wellbeing. Over 100 adults take part weekly in these programmes for one day per week or more.’

- Specialist learning disability arts organisation
Partnerships
Among respondents, mainstream arts organisations and museums were more likely to partner with learning disability specialists outside the arts for expertise in particular projects and engagement activities for people with a learning disability. Responses included 11 partnerships between mainstream and specialist arts organisations. Fourteen partnerships formed between mainstream organisations and learning disability specialists working outside the arts and a further five responses involved learning disability specialists outside of the arts supporting people to access and engage with particular mainstream arts organisations. There were, in addition, two instances of specialist learning disability organisations outside the arts providing training and evaluation to various mainstream arts organisations. Of course there is an infinitely larger number of learning disability support and social care organisations than there are specialist arts organisations for people with learning disabilities, so one would expect to see many more of the latter kind of partnership.

All but one of the nine specialist arts organisations who provided information on funding were reliant on trusts and foundations or Arts Council funding. One other was self-sustaining through personal budgets payment for attendance (in conjunction with NHS and county councils).

Marketing and attracting participants
Those who operated in conjunction with health and adult social care services recruited members from these networks. Just one marketed through specialist disability media. Two marketed through their partner venues/organisations and the rest through their own marketing or social media. A few
organisations commented on difficulties recruiting new members or participants, resulting in a small, consistent and sometimes long-term group benefiting from the activity. Respondents felt the need to build larger networks of contacts, audiences and participants. This was repeated in conversation with other organisations, both mainstream and specialist.

Evaluation
As noted, a large proportion of the specialist learning disability arts organisations relied on trusts and foundations for funding with a noticeable impact on their approach to evaluation. Of those who answered, five had evaluations by external organisations or academics as part of their funding requirements. The rest relied on internal evaluations, feedback forms or measurement of success against individuals’ own baselines.

‘We have pictorial evaluations. We have tried using secret ballot boxes, audiences and participants vote from one star * to five stars ***** in response to productions. We have tried filming responses and a trainee with a learning disability was supported in creating and editing his own film asking audiences and creative to reply to his question: ‘what do you think of it so far?’

- Specialist theatre company of artists with disabilities

‘We have evaluated with a SWOT analysis; we evaluate our projects to feed-back to funding bodies; we gather feedback from audiences and workshop recipients. Trustees meet with the participants for feedback and ideas.’

- Specialist theatre company of artists with learning disabilities

Different needs of audiences and artists
The majority of the specialist arts organisations that responded to our survey were either supporting professional artists with a learning disability or supporting access to the arts for groups with learning disabilities. The needs and aspirations of artists with a learning disability have quite different support needs and aspirations to audiences with learning disabilities. This is reflected in the different expertise offered by these two types of organisations (although there were examples of organisations conducting both types of activity). Visitors, audience members or project participants would benefit from reasonable measures such as:

- Adapted ticketing
- Improved way-finding
- Relaxed performances
- Approachable front-of-house staff
- Easyread information and guidance
- Dedicated projects or activities.

Artists and performers with a learning disability may have more particular needs around, for example:

- Support in identifying jobs and activities that will benefit them
- Support in finding resources and managing finances
Communication support and advocacy during the process of working with an organisation (particularly for freelance artists).

During this research we have encountered freelance artists with a learning disability who require a PA for their work, and so face problems of affordability when offering their practice. Arts organisations – and mainstream organisations in particular – would benefit from improved awareness of the different needs of artists and audience members with a learning disability.

Creativity and the social history of learning disability

A particularly interesting and potentially rich area of creative work is that exploring and communicating the experience of adults with learning disabilities living in the community. There are excellent examples of organisations – often specialist arts organisations or mainstream museums supported by learning disability specialists outside the arts – exploring the oral history of the local community of people with disabilities. Histories of institutionalisation, family life, education and social experiences all have the potential to underpin powerful and informative performances, installations, exhibitions and pieces of art. These would be particularly pertinent for people with learning disabilities but have relevance, importance and value for the wider population. Communicating these seminal experiences through creative expression places the experience of people with a learning disability squarely within mainstream cultural and historical spaces and debates.

Obstacles

Barriers and problems mentioned by specialist arts organisations included marketing, recruiting new people to membership, paying artists for their work, the practicalities of getting people to activities and retaining consistent contact with them. As mentioned above, organisations experienced difficulties contacting potential new members and participants to their organisations and activities. Marketing their work to a wider audience was also occasionally difficult. Practical challenges such as transport to venues and maintaining contact with members were also mentioned. This difficulty was also experienced by mainstream organisations.

“For our own projects we also find that regular contact is extremely important in keeping up people’s skills levels in the arts. [...] In our experience, some of the biggest challenges in people with learning disabilities accessing our activities and also arts events elsewhere are to do with transport, supporting people to attend and administering this.”

- Specialist theatre company of artists with learning disabilities

Aspirations

Common aims included building a platform for everyone to experience the arts, improving confidence and skills and reducing isolation by promoting independence and a lively social atmosphere. Three specialist arts organisations (and two mainstream arts organisations) explicitly stated that they aimed to reduce stigma and to challenge common misconceptions of learning disability or disability more generally by promoting professional artists with a learning disability or engagement with the arts.

“[Aims:] Philosophy: Our founding principle and philosophy is that all disabled people should have the opportunity to participate fully in arts and culture.”
Vision: An inspiring and inclusive arts sector, accessible to all

Mission: We will promote great art and inclusive practices, knowledge and learning, to ensure that disabled people have active and influential roles in arts and culture - as leaders, artists, participants and audiences, and as part of a skilled workforce.’

- Specialist disability arts organisation

‘We aim to offer high quality art and culture education for people with learning disabilities and autism and social opportunities in London museums and galleries.’

- Specialist learning disability arts engagement organisation

Participant ages and activity/art form from among specialist learning disability organisations.
Specialist disability organisations - not strictly learning disability

Three organisations supported professional artists with a disability.

Image: Heart n Soul
The picture from learning disability organisations outside the arts

Seven responses came from learning disability specialist organisations working outside the arts, such as advocacy groups, charities and supported living organisations. In addition, 13 learning disability support organisations got in touch wishing to remain informed about this work – the majority of people who got in touch for this reason.

These organisations commonly worked in partnership with mainstream arts organisations, museums and galleries, providing either expertise on topics such as accessibility and easyread material or participants for projects. There were also examples of these organisations working to support people to attend arts activities, museums and galleries. Emphasis among these organisations was typically on advocacy and improving service users’ levels of choice and meaningful activity.

‘[Aims?] customer inclusion and greater awareness and choice. Meaningful use of time. Greater independence.’

- Specialist learning disability organisation (non arts)

The need for a wider choice for people with a learning disability was repeatedly emphasised. For learning disability specialists outside the arts, engagement in arts activities or visiting museums and galleries was often undertaken with a view to offering people with a learning disability the same choice over how they spend their time as that offered to everyone else. This same phenomenon was seen in promoting arts activities – people were enthusiastic about opportunities to participate in new activities, because such opportunities were few and far between. In the current climate people have very limited choices, partly because there are few activities and organisations extant but also because those that there are may not be widely known about.
LSO Create. Image: Kevin Leighton
The range of activities

Children, schools and young people.

“We believe strongly in linking the young people we work with into pathways of employment and/or further training in the arts. We are developing links with other organisations in Hackney and London that provide higher or further education as well as opportunities to develop their aspirations as paid artists.”

- Mainstream museum

The activities for children with a learning disability included venues working to improve access, enabling young people to make art, training for staff and volunteers about working with children with a learning disability or with special educational needs, giving young people with learning disabilities a voice – either in using arts to express their identity and experience or in providing a platform within mainstream organisations for young people with a learning disability to give feedback, express opinions or to demonstrate expertise – and arts organisations that work within special schools.

‘Having recently hosted a panel discussion where a number of artists with disabilities talked about their experiences and career thus far, we want to continue working alongside such artists in our work with young people, raising aspirations and creating new ways of working with young people with disabilities.’

- Mainstream theatre

Of our respondents, five mainstream arts organisations, museums or galleries described projects working for young people with a learning disability. Three organisations were specialist arts organisations for people with a learning disability. Mainstream organisations’ funding and organisational structures seem to emphasise activities for children and young people. Arts organisations typically have a network of contacts in schools and organisations working with children. These activities were often supported by SEN schools who could offer logistical assistance from teachers and other staff. Similar assistance is often not available to support adults. There may also be less clarity about the potential benefits of experiencing galleries and museums for adults with a learning disability and therefore what would be good practice in improving access, which might contribute to a preference for activities for children.
Case Study: Camden Arts Centre.

Get The Message
This project has been running for 12 years in partnership with Camden Arts Centre’s local schools for young people with profound learning disabilities. Approximately 25 young people take part each year, plus participants’ families at the annual family day.

During the past three years we have also focused on disseminating what we’ve learned from this project to other education professionals and arts organisations with the ultimate aim of breaking down some of the barriers to inclusion in creative activities for people with learning disabilities.

Each year, we run 18 workshops led by two artists, in our partner schools and at Camden Arts Centre. The year culminates with a schools day, when participants from different schools come together to meet each other, and a family day, for families to take part in taster activities and witness the quality of the work produced.

Alongside this, we run CPD sessions for teachers working on the project, and we have formed a working group of our peers from 11 other arts organisations (including the Whitechapel, British Museum, Tate etc) which examines best practice for creating accessible programmes for people with learning disabilities.

We have also run annual training weekends for 15 artists to develop skills in leading accessible projects.

How Can Art?
This is an accessible Saturday project for young people aged 12-17. The aim is to provide artist-led support for young people who are interested in developing their art-making skills, finding out a little bit about where an interest in art could lead and possibly progressing to making applications to study art after they leave school.

Regular workshops are led by artists who have previously worked on Get The Message, and are open to all young people. We promote this project through our website and printed bulletins. We are able to provide specialist transport and support workers for five Get The Message participants to take part in these workshops independently of family circumstances.

Engagement activities for people with a learning disability
‘The project aims to challenge the notion of disability as a limitation, and through artist-led activities to introduce new skills and ways of learning as well as enhancing participants’ social networks and confidence in a gallery setting.’

- Mainstream arts venue and gallery

Engagement includes workshops and activities as well as sessions for people with learning disabilities, organisations which facilitate people with learning disabilities getting involved and engaged with the arts, galleries and museums and promoting people with learning disabilities to make, do and take part in arts activities themselves. These activities were more equally shared by mainstream arts organisations...
and specialist arts organisations, with five mainstream organisations describing engagement activities, four were activities by a specialist arts organisation and three by non-arts organisations supporting people with learning disabilities. Some of the specialist organisations’ activities fell entirely under this heading.

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**Case Study: Tate (work for adults)**

**In The Frame**

Tate Liverpool has hosted In the Frame since 2006. In the Frame is a steering group of adults with learning disabilities who deliver events that engage hard to reach and disadvantaged people in the local community. The programme has involved over 2600 disabled people in creative projects that promote participation and independence. Their most recent event at Tate Liverpool was The Art of Parties. In the Frame will also be co-designing programme activities for Tate Liverpool’s forthcoming Transmitting Warhol exhibition.

**Community Learning Team**

Community Learning at Tate Modern is proud to have worked with a wide range of learning disabled adults and arts organisations working with learning disabled adults, since the gallery opened in 2000. Public events led by learning disabled artists in the early years of Tate Modern include Coral's 'The Shed show' previewed at Tate Modern on the Bridge in 2002 before its national tour. Most recently, Coral shared their performance and visual arts research methods and outcomes with Learning colleagues and an invited audience of contemporary dance professionals at Tate Modern in 2013.

A long term partnership with Haringey Social Services, where adults with profound learning disabilities have participated in 'Art into Life' workshops at Tate Britain and Tate Modern, from 2000-2014, uses a wide range of sensory learning, including sound and touch to explore and engage with modern and contemporary artworks. This partnership has also enabled Tate staff to gain further knowledge on learning styles and disability awareness, by attending staff training which is co-led and informed by learning disabled participants who themselves have attended learning programmes at Tate.

**Digital Learning**

We are currently working with Intoart, an artist collective of adults with learning disabilities, to produce a film about their thirteen years of practice. Keen to make this history more publicly accessible, Intoart are in the early stages of creating their own community archive. The film will document this process whilst looking at how the artists have used Tate’s archive as a resource for personal research and artistic practice; Future programmes led by learning disabled adults include the forthcoming Tate Britain event in November 2014 with visual arts collective Intoart (also working with Digital Archive colleagues) when current archival research processes at Intoart’s base at Studio Voltaire, London, will be shared with an invited arts audience.

**Access Programme**

Working in partnership with a number of service providers and local authorities, we create a day-long event which attracts upward of 200 adults with learning disabilities to enjoy a day at Tate Modern. Activities and tours are run throughout the day, which engage attendees with the Tate collection and exhibitions, and the learning activity achieved at these events is taken back to day centres where people respond to the Tate collection through their own creative work.
Access to collections, events and venues
Activities focused on improving access to collections, events and venues were either mainstream organisations working to improve their own accessibility (three organisations), specialist learning disability organisations arranging visits to museums, galleries or arts venues (three organisations) or organisations providing accessibility training for venues and event organisers in the mainstream arts, museums and galleries sector. Four learning disability organisations working outside of the arts also ran activities to improve access. These organisations might either have worked with an arts organisation, museum or gallery to improve access for people with particular needs or organised events and trips for service users as a day centre activity.

Case study: London Symphony Orchestra (LSO)
As part of their LSO Discovery programme the London Symphony Orchestra has been working to improve access to world-class music by inviting adults with learning disabilities to attend their series of free open rehearsals and Friday lunch time concerts. Both of these events are an opportunity to experience a high quality concert in a relaxed and informal atmosphere. The LSO also runs a creative session after one Friday concert a term, in which audience members with a learning disability can discuss and explore the music in more detail and create and perform music of their own.

LSO Create is a monthly opportunity for adults with learning disabilities to meet with musicians from the orchestra, to make music based on the orchestra’s current repertoire and to try their hand at various instruments.

In addition the LSO run an annual intensive performance programme in which a group of adults with learning disabilities work with LSO musicians and composers to produce their own composition, which is then performed at a public event.

The orchestra also do outreach work including workshops and projects in special schools and adult social care day services.

Case study: Ealing Mencap – RealMe project
RealMe provides support to adults with learning disabilities and/or physical disabilities to identify art venues, galleries and museums they would like to visit and provides staff to accompany groups to attend events. Of particular interest to Ealing Mencap is the potential for people with learning disabilities to find work experience or paid employment opportunities within large heritage/arts facilities.

Approximately 140 people attend RealMe each week.
Supporting professional artists

‘It encourages professional development for artists with learning disabilities so they are empowered to forward their own work and to take part in cultural activities in their own right. It creates opportunities for artists with learning disabilities to work with those without disabilities to forward practice sharing and understanding.’

- Specialist learning disability arts organisation – dance

Activities enabling and promoting professional artists with a learning disability were most commonly supported by specialist arts organisations. This included providing studio space, resources, support and training to adults with a learning disability, companies of actors with learning disabilities performing theatre, dance, music or visual art, providing a platform for people with learning disabilities to perform or display their work and raising awareness of artists with learning disabilities (in most instances this outcome is a corollary of the first three). More than half (five) of the organisations who described this activity were specialist arts organisations for adults with learning disability.
Corali works hard to increase the profile and acceptance of people with learning disabilities in arts activities in London. It does this in a number of ways:

- It creates opportunities for professional artists with learning disabilities to profile their work in a variety of venues.
- It encourages professional development for artists with learning disabilities so they are empowered to forward their own work and to take part in cultural activities in their own right.
- It creates opportunities for artists with learning disabilities to work with those without disabilities to forward practice sharing and understanding.
- It offers outreach opportunities for people with learning disabilities to participate in arts activities.
- It works in partnership with other organisations to strengthen the ‘sector’.

The work is aimed at adults and children with learning disabilities. In the past three years Corali has worked with 300 people with learning disabilities. We are currently developing arts based work placements for people with learning disabilities and developing contexts to show our performance work.

**Studio/space**

Studio spaces and a chance to work uninterrupted are essential for developing many forms of artistic practice regardless of whether the artists have a learning disability. Four respondents supported artists in this way. Studio spaces were provided by mainstream arts venues working in partnership, primarily with adult social care and non arts learning disability specialists. There were also examples of specialist arts learning disability organisations pairing with mainstream studio providers to ensure that professional artists with a learning disability had sufficient space to work.

**Case Study: IntoArt, ActionSpace and Studio Voltaire**

Studio Voltaire provide studio space to Actionspace and Intoart – two charities working with artists who have learning disabilities.

This provision within a mainstream arts environment is crucial to our organisation’s mission. We have worked in partnership with the charities to give a platform to these artists’ work within our studio, gallery and education programmes. Actionspace and Intoart provide studio space to a total of 36 artists on an ongoing basis within our building with many more participants and visitors with learning disabilities engaged via their programmes.

Studio Voltaire is currently developing its building strategy and recognises the need to improve its premises in relation to access and working conditions for artists with learning disabilities as a core part of our organisation mission.
Club nights

‘In the mainstream young people take the rite of passage from school disco to pub to club as a medium to learn social skills and develop self-confidence, this is not possible for many young people with learning disabilities.’

- Mainstream arts venue

Two respondents organised club nights and discos for people with learning disabilities. One was a mainstream arts organisation and the other a specialist learning disability organisation. These events (and others elsewhere) provide a safe, creative and social space for people of all ages to enjoy themselves, grow in confidence and be part of a vibrant social scene from which they may otherwise be excluded.

‘Heart n Soul’s Allsorts is a place where adults with learning disabilities can try new art activities, meet new people and have fun. You can take part in a range of workshops, ranging from music to circus skills in a safe and friendly atmosphere where you decide what to do.’

- Heart n Soul, Specialist arts organisation (taken from the Heart n Soul website)

Case Study: ArtsDepot/Clive

We deliver club nights and workshop programmes for young people (mostly 18-25) with learning disabilities under the brand Clive. The club nights are supported by a large number of specialist staff and parents/carers go to a chill out zone while the young people learn social skills that can help them lead more independent lifestyles.

The club nights include a high quality arts performance as part of our creative programme and in the lead up to the events young people attend workshops and then do a performance at the events.

Over 100 young people attend each event plus parents and carers, the workshop programme benefits around ten young people per term.

ArtsDepot liaises with support organisations across North London and has a database of hundreds of contacts, we also market Clive nights and workshops through our website, season brochures etc.

Easyread

Easyread material is a means of making text more accessible to people with a learning disability or those for whom written English can be difficult. Generally, easyread consist of short simplified sentences with an accompanying image to make it easier to interpret meaning. In the context of arts organisations, museums and galleries, easyread resources can enable visitors with a learning disability to feel better informed about the venue, the collections of artifacts as well as what to expect, to follow the story or theme of a performance/exhibition and to make way finding easier. Three respondents provided
easyread services as part of their services. Of these, two were non arts learning disability specialists working in conjunction with a mainstream organisation.

**Case Study: Sir John Soane’s museum/The Camden Advocacy Project**

Sir John Soane’s Museum has created an easyread information guide for visitors with learning disabilities. This was developed by members of The Advocacy Project for people with learning disabilities and can be downloaded online or borrowed in paper form on arrival to the museum.

Sample page: Sir John Soane Museum’s Easyread booklet.
Camden easy info team at The Advocacy Project /Sir John Soane’s Museum

**Relaxed performances**

‘Challenging accepted definitions of theatre and audience, we create innovative, multi-sensory and highly participatory productions by transforming everyday environments into colourful, tactile ‘wonderlands’”

- Specialist disability arts organisation - theatre

Relaxed performances are adapted specifically for improving accessibility and comfort for people with sensory requirements, autistic spectrum disorders and other learning disabilities. Characteristics include reduced intensity lighting and sound, house lighting throughout the performance and freedom to make a noise or move around without disapproval or admonition. Three responses included relaxed
performances, although we also heard from specialist theatre organisations whose work in its entirety might be described as relaxed performances.

Case study: Polka Theatre

Polka Theatre pioneered ‘relaxed’ performances for children on the autistic spectrum – we were one of the first theatres to do so - and other theatres have now followed suit. Relaxed performances feature a reduced audience capacity to avoid crowding, modified lights and sounds without the extremes that can be disconcerting to children on the autism spectrum and a welcome-pack that lets the children know what to expect from the experience before they arrive at the theatre.

We offer relaxed performances for every main house show and for two productions in our smaller adventure theatre. As part of our Relaxed Performance work we are able to offer free show related workshops and we work with groups such as Merton Mencap, Wandsworth Sensory Support Services and South Thames Crossroads to encourage them to bring audiences to our shows.

Case study: Autism Hampshire

Autism Hampshire work in partnership with the Mayflower Theatre and the Forest Forge Theatre company to put on relaxed performances of pantomimes. The relaxed performance is a specially adapted and relaxed performance for customers with a wide range of disabilities and for those on the autistic spectrum.

The project is in its fourth year. This year over 1000 people with disabilities and their carers attended. This project has now extended and we also work with the Anvil Theatre in Basingstoke to support their relaxed viewing of the pantomime.

The partnership team work together to develop the shows. The team from Autism Hampshire view the performance and then work with the theatre company, director and actors to make any necessary changes to lights, sound etc. The Mayflower theatre team make many adaptations to the theatre.
Art forms and activities across the 47 responses

Performance art/theatre includes dance, opera, theatre

Visual art also includes photography
**Partnerships**

Mainstream arts organisations and learning disability organisations outside of the arts\(^6\) 14
Mainstream arts organisations and specialist arts organisations 11
Mainstream arts organisations working together 2
Specialist arts organisations working together 2
Specialist arts organisations working with learning disability organisations outside of the arts 5

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\(^6\) This excludes organisations supporting adults with a learning disability promoting and supporting access to mainstream or specialist arts organisation events and activities
Conclusions

1. Excellence of specialist organisations

There is a considerable range of specialist learning disability and disability arts organisations forming a rich and diverse sector producing extraordinary quality work with people with learning disabilities as both artists and audience. The sector includes, for example, innovative theatre companies, organisations supporting professional artists with a learning disability and those producing performances and artwork specifically for audiences of people with a disability. These organisations occupy an interesting and important position on the arts landscape; at once challenging preconceptions of learning disability, and promoting engagement by adults with learning disabilities in the mainstream arts and museums sector and embodying and creating a form of ‘outsider’ art.

2. Islands of excellence among mainstream arts organisations

Among mainstream organisations there were leading lights – organisations with ongoing or recurring projects or a range of promotional and other activities for people with learning disabilities to access activities, exhibitions and performances. These islands of excellence had a committed, consistent and creative approach to welcoming people with learning disabilities to engage and participate with a varied range of activities and resources within that organisation. Characteristic of such organisations was a willingness to learn from and build upon projects and activities for adults with learning disabilities to constantly improve provision for this audience. Examples of such organisations include Camden Arts Centre and Tate.

Those mainstream organisations that had successful projects for people with learning disabilities were often reliant on one or two highly motivated people on the ground in their organisation working to make the project happen. This personal interest was combined with an organisational structure that allowed them to pursue that interest. The funding for these programmes is also generally from trusts and foundations and therefore not always part of the core funded activities of the organisation.

3. Enthusiasm and interest

There was an undercurrent of enthusiasm and the general sense that people knew they ought to be doing more and wanted to make a greater contribution to meeting the needs of people with a learning disability. A common response to the survey was people getting in touch asking to be kept informed about this work as, although they currently had no provision for people with a learning disability, they were keen to do more in the future. The enthusiasm of those who had recent or current projects was notably expressed in a willingness to build on current practice, open up channels of communication with other organisations and to communicate learning and experience to other organisations.

Arts organisations’ enthusiasm and interest was matched on the demand side; we found that many people with learning disabilities – and families, carers and organisations which support them – were extremely keen to get involved in activities at arts venues, museums and galleries. In one notable example, Lemos&Crane sent a publicity email to our learning disability database on behalf of the
London Symphony Orchestra. The response was overwhelming. Within a few days the LSO Create team had fully booked their schedule of events as well as establishing a waiting list for next season’s. More people made contact with LSO Create in that short period of time than they were hoping to engage over a three year period. Furthermore, people were willing to make long journeys in to London from far afield in order to participate in the LSO Create activities.

4. A patchy landscape

Across the board there are still too few dedicated activities, projects or programmes for adults with learning disabilities in mainstream arts organisations, museums and galleries. Very few mainstream organisations had an embedded, publicised, ongoing stream for people with learning disabilities or had facilities for those with learning disabilities (such as EasyRead signage, regular relaxed performances and pre-visit information) to access public events. Many organisations seem to be doing little or nothing. The general landscape of provision is patchy and halting: many small or shorter term projects or activities with little sustained commitment, impact or connections with other organisations. While beneficial and important, these projects often do not have an ongoing legacy or embedded impact in that organisation’s practice after their completion.

5. More for children than adults

The impact of funding and organisational structures on the availability and format of work for people with learning disabilities was apparent in mainstream organisations. Children and young people were better served than adults, for example, as education funding structures allowed for work with those with an SEN statement and activities within the highly structured day-to-day schedule of schools/special schools.

Adults with a learning disability are the group most vulnerable to living isolated lives, away from family, with few friends and a limited social circle. The benefits of arts, museums and galleries for this group are profound but most mainstream organisations struggled to respond effectively. Programmes for adults were more likely to be shorter term one off projects. Some had difficulties with marketing to potential participants, recruiting new members and sustaining contact were all notable.

The dearth of opportunities available for adults is in a way reflected in the activities of specialist learning disability arts organisations and learning disability specialists outside the arts.

6. No bridging network

Organisations (particularly mainstream organisations) had difficulties with making connections with the learning disability community in terms of exchanging information and advertising. Related to the difficulties of recruiting new people to specialist organisations, some mainstream organisations had difficulty contacting people with a learning disability and their supporters – other than through particular organisations such as day centres.
The significance of support workers and key supporters in getting people to events and activities and supporting them to find out about things that were happening was all too apparent. Although many people working as a support worker or key worker might have a significant interest or hobby in the arts, museums or galleries for themselves, not everyone feels that this interest of theirs is relevant to their role at work. For many people, engaging with arts, museums and galleries will be contingent on having someone to support them through the process.

The dedicated learning disability arts sector is vibrant and diverse but there could be much more in terms of its connections and interactions with the mainstream arts sector. An exchange of expertise, resources and learning between mainstream institutions and vice versa would open up both types of organisation to more diverse artists and audiences as well as greatly improving access and awareness for adults with a learning disability. Some examples of successful partnerships and interactions (such as Tate and Corali Dance) set an example for partnership working that would bring more people with learning disabilities into contact with the arts, museums and galleries in a meaningful, enjoyable and exciting way.

Corali: Empty Theatre Dream Image: Andy Hood. Corali performers - Bethan Kendirck
Towards a framework for good practice

We have noted several times in this paper that, although there are islands of excellence in both mainstream and specialist arts organisations, many arts organisations need to do more across the board. Judging by the number of organisations without a previous track record which want to be part of future development of this work, awareness is growing among arts organisations of the need to do more. We have also noted the lack of clarity about the nature of good practice. Clearly a policy framework for good practice needs to be developed and disseminated. Potential headings for such a framework are set out below. Statutory funders as well as trusts and foundations will want beneficiaries to comply with emerging frameworks of good practice and could exert considerable and welcome pressure by making compliance with good practice a condition of funding.

1. **Build a network of mainstream and specialist arts, adult social care and supported housing organisations** with an interest in and commitment to increasing opportunities for people with learning disabilities to get involved in the arts at all levels in all ways.

2. **Build stronger, more enduring partnerships between specialist and mainstream arts organisations** both to showcase the excellent work being created by specialist organisations as well as creating opportunities for collaboration and co-production of new work by artists with learning disabilities, either for themselves or in collaboration with other artists.

3. **Supporting artists with learning disabilities** to find spaces to work, make new work, establish collaborations and reach a wider audience.

4. **Audience development** to ensure that people with learning disabilities are better informed about arts events, either by artists with learning disabilities or others. Leverage networks of family, carers and support staff to ensure that people with learning disabilities know what’s going on where and how to make sure they get there. E.g. Gig Buddies – a project run by Stay up Late in which people with a learning disability are paired with a ‘gig buddy’ - somebody with similar tastes and interests who does not have a learning disability – who then accompanies them to gigs and other events. Gig buddies might also share ideas for other experiences they both might enjoy.

5. **Improving access** across the board including marketing and publicity, easy booking online and face to face, signage, wayfinding, accessible texts in programmes and catalogues, relaxed performances.

6. **Improve the awareness of staff**, particularly front of house and gallery assistants, of ways of improving the experience of people with learning disabilities to artistic work, collections etc.

7. **Increase employment opportunities for people with learning disabilities** in arts organisations, museums and galleries.
Appendix: Survey respondents
This includes all those who replied to the pilot and those who offered information about their work but did not complete a good practice form.

ACAVA (Association for Cultural Advancement through Visual Art)  National Gallery
Autism Hampshire  Oily Cart
ADF Arts and Disability Equality Charter  Open Storytellers
ArtsDepot (The Arts Depot Trust Ltd)  Outside In
Arty Party Limited  Oval House
Bow Arts Trust  Polka Theatre
Brighter Futures  Purple Patch Arts
Brighton and Hove speak out  Ragged School Museum Trust
British Museum  Razed Roof
Camden Arts Centre  Royal Air Force Museum London
Corali Dance Company  Royal Court Theatre - The English Stage
Creative Minds with Carousel  Company Ltd
Croydon Day Opportunities  Sir John Soane’s Museum with Camden
Ealing Mencap  Advocacy Project
English National Ballet  Shape Arts
Friends Action North East  Spare Tyre
Geffrye Museum  Streetwise Opera
Heritage Crafts Association  Studio Voltaire
Ideabox  Sutton Council
Immediate Theatre  Tate
Intoart  Tricycle Theatre Company Ltd
LIFT Festival  The Lightbox
London Symphony Orchestra  University of Reading
Making Sense CIC  Venture Arts
Museums Association  Vital Xposure

Organisations who were keen to be kept informed on the outcome of the project

Blue Apple Theatre Company  Heart n Soul
Bristol Museum & Art Gallery  Hertfordshire County Council
Cuspinc/Sprungdigi  HF Mencap
English Folk Dance and Song Society  Jewish Museum
Friends for Friends  London Borough of Havering
Future Directions  London Borough of Hounslow
Guideposts Trust  Mencap Cymru
Havering Community Learning Disability Service  National Gallery
The organisations listed above are those who contacted Lemos&Crane before the survey deadline. Subsequent to our call for good practice numerous other organisations have expressed an interest in the work, described relevant activities or the hope to remain informed about the outcomes of the project.