

Raising the Bar Together:

An Artists and Organisation Resource (January 2021)



Most of us will agree that the visual arts should be accessible for all and that opportunities should be accessible to disabled artists on a level playing field. This rarely happens. Many barriers are still experienced by disabled artists, whether that be in accessing opportunities / calls, arts spaces or funding. These obstacles are often created unwittingly by organisations,

most of which would be horrified (I hope) that they were creating this situation. This is usually the result of a lack of knowledge about the wide range of disability needs, or by being closed minded to new ways of doing things. Sometimes, there is a blatant disregard for access needs.

Project Participants...

Project creator and lead

Gaia Redgrave: A freelance neuro-diverse disabled artist, neuro-diversity in arts mentor and advisor.

RTBT Selected artists

Anushiye Yarnell: Freelance artist & choreographer working with dance and movement.

Gina Biggs: Researcher, performer, theatre maker & director of SheWolf.

Hazel Cardew: Freelance artist focusing on mark making and minimalist aesthetics as a form of composition and score writing.

Chris Tally Evans: Artist, theatre director, writer, and equalities campaigner.

Mentors

Chris Mooney-Brown: Co-founder & Company director, g39, Cardiff

Mike Layward: Artistic Director DASH Arts



RTBT was a three month project funded by Arts Council Wales Stabilisation National Lottery Fund. It was delivered for Welsh based artists, in its entirety through video conferencing (Zoom), Email & WhatsApp. This decision was made due to a number of reasons: accessibility for disabled artists as they would not need to travel to a specific location; safety within the Covid-19 pandemic government restrictions; and due to some participants being more vulnerable. Participants were located within South, West and Mid Wales.

RTBT sought to understand more clearly the issues faced by disabled artists through experiential collaboration (disabled and non-disabled artist), conversation & reflection. Project activities included the examination of experience & sharing of barriers faced, new thoughts and concepts on how and where disabled artists fit within the current visual arts scene, alternative and innovative ways of communicating access needs and new experimental work including two new short films.



An Arty Political Broadcast by Chris Tally Evans



Score by Hazel Cardew & Gina Biggs

Artists came to the project for two reasons; either they had repeatedly found it difficult to access artist opportunities due to their disability and / or wanted to improve access of all. Within a short space of time during the first RTBT group meeting the art cohort identified 32 barriers and differences that they had experienced personally and often multiple times. We very quickly found that there was a big problem facing disabled artists and the visual arts is far from a level playing field for all.

The 32 identified situations are as follows...

1. Being paid access costs as a 'kindness' but not for their time as an artist or being paid less than their counterparts.
2. Being present on a project as it provides an easier route to funding for the project provider.
3. Inability accessing funding due to application procedure.
4. Inability accessing funding due to the requirements of the funding.
5. Direct discrimination when attempting to access projects and space.
6. Indirect discrimination when attempting to access projects and space.

7. Ignorance of the disability discrimination act.
8. Inaccessibility to projects even when the calls were written specifically for disabled artist.
9. Lack of recognition of the artists disability and that disability is more than a wheelchair.
10. Lack of understanding of neurodiversity.
11. Complete dismissal of access needs.
12. Closed minds and closed ears.
13. Organisations blind to the truth of lack of access.
14. Organisations using a catch all statement of ‘We will do everything we can’, without backing up the claim with what they can or are willing to do to aid access. Using the statement, so often means nothing will happen and that there is a lack of understanding.
15. Vulnerability in communicating access needs.
16. Lack of opportunity in communicating access needs.
17. Being present in projects / work opportunities where the disabled artist cannot address / care for their physical, mental and neuro-diverse wellbeing due to expectations of others, resulting in illness.
18. The necessity to mask (to cover up difficulties) or to be someone they are not, causing mental distress.
19. The expectation to keep calm and carry on irrespectively.
20. Lack of culture of care.
21. Unheard.
22. Unseen.
23. Scared to put themselves forward due to not being able to fit into expectations of the norm.
24. Lack of support in applying for opportunities and opportunities to apply in a way that is more suited to them.
25. Feeling that they will not be valued in a project or that the opportunity is presented in such a way that they ‘know’ it will not be accessible to them. Closed language from the provider in the call so they do not apply.
26. Guilt & embarrassment about not being able to present themselves ‘professionally’ due to feeling ill, in pain, emotional from overwhelm, needing to work from bed etc.
27. Difficulty with executive function and lack of support or recognition with this.

28. Artists difficulty in explaining access needs due to their lack of understanding and knowledge of what is available or can be done.
29. A crevasse between arts organisations and disabled artists. Them and us situations.
30. Disabled artists seen as being self-indulgent due to being emotional as the result of disability related difficulties.
31. The same recurrent problems with access and little change in 20 years.
32. Lack of understanding as to where they fit as a disabled artist.

Unfortunately, the artists involved were not shocked at hearing the shared stories of widespread discrimination within the arts. It is long past the time for change and indeed it was recognised that some changes have been made. However, there is still a long way to go until we reach a place where disabled artists are valued as individuals and for their work and not expected to deliver in detriment to their physical, mental, or neurodiverse wellbeing. It is intended that Raising the Bar as a project continues in an ever-developing form to research and address these issues.

Intensions for the next step...

- We are currently seeking funding for an extended version of Raising the Bar Together to enable us to address some of the issues encountered by disabled artists in relation to access, focussing on a culture of care.
- We plan to work with organisations to understand their experiences working with disabled artists and delivering access support.
- To research more deeply the challenges faced by disabled artist's and visual arts organisations on a wider scale and propose a working structure for a sustainable creative culture of care, enabling both artist and organisation to come together on a level playing field. Ultimately the goal is to create an environment within the visual arts that leads to a culture of care and value for all involved.

Final word...

It is a time to be bold, be different and lead by example.

To be open, honest & willing to learn,

To gather the knowledge & to act upon that knowledge.

To be proactive in providing opportunity to talk about creative access.

To create the capacity for change.

We aim to be looking back at the changes that we have made in twenty years' time and be asking what next rather than, why are we asking the same questions after 40 years?

This document is also available in large print, as an Mp3 sound file and in Welsh.

If you require it in a different format, have any questions or are an organisation or funder wishing to be part of a Raising the Bar project, please contact Gaia directly:

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