

CULTURAL * SH/FT

Ideas for your Venue and Disabled People

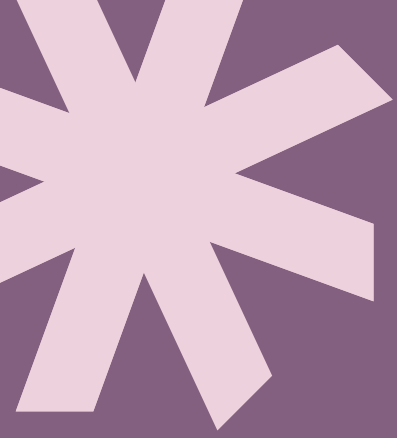
Sharing Experiences
Learning Together





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Cultural Shift

Cultural Shift was a three year disabled-led strategic project funded by Spirit of 2012 and delivered by Little Cog in partnership with ARC between 2015-2018.

Definition of disability - We work to the **Social Model of Disability** which was developed by disabled people. The Social Model says that disability is caused by the way society is organised, rather than by a person's condition or difference. It looks at ways of removing barriers that restrict life choices for disabled people. Under the disability umbrella are a whole range of people who experience exclusion because of different conditions including those relating to mobility or physicality, mental health, neurodivergence, learning disability, sensory conditions including visually impaired and Deaf people, and many chronic health conditions.



Why was Cultural Shift needed?

Before Cultural Shift, there was a massive gap in our work: the voices and stories of disabled people were not being included. As an organisation, we were missing out on the creativity, skills and perspectives held by disabled people, and our audiences were missing out too. Presenting disabled-led work by Little Cog had given us a glimmer of what we were missing, and we wanted more.

25% of people in the North East of England¹ identify as disabled. This is a huge proportion of our communities and therefore it was a priority for us to ensure that disabled people were properly represented in our programme and workforce, and that disabled audiences and participants were able to access our work. Many disabled people face multiple barriers to engaging in creative and cultural activity, especially in an area such as Stockton and the Tees Valley where aspects of life like transport and unemployment are major challenges.

If we were to fully benefit from working with disabled people we needed to change as an organisation, to embed disability equality in all aspects of our work. Our artistic policy is to present work that is 'contemporary and relevant' to our communities – so this meant including disabled people, on and off stage.

Cultural Shift became a way that we could share our space, our resources and our platforms with others; to learn how to hand over power and influence and allow previously unheard voices to be heard.

Annabel Turpin, Chief Executive & Artistic Director, ARC

IMPACT

Cultural Shift has fundamentally changed ARC's understanding of disability as an organisation, and the part disabled people can and should play in everything we do. We have learned how to make that a reality, and ARC is all the richer for it.

¹Disability in the United Kingdom – Papworth Trust 2018



Disabled people have experienced significant discrimination and exclusion for many centuries and been represented in culture in negative tropes and stereotypes, perpetuating a lower status. Our cultural, historical, and socio-political experiences have remained hidden, and the sharing of our culture through amazing disabled artists has been under-resourced. In the absence of meaningful long term strategic initiatives for disabled-led work across Arts Council National Portfolio, project funded and other publicly funded organisations, we have campaigned for a long time for change led by disabled people on our terms. It is more than time for change, and instead of us repeatedly having to make a case for our place in the arts, we need improved education of the arts sector, particularly decision makers, and a strategy and action to bring this about with tangible results.

We had such good experiences working with ARC prior to Cultural Shift, and had built a mutually respectful relationship, it felt there was more we could do together. The team were so open to conversations about change, and supportive of new work and less heard voices. Little Cog was creating new disabled-led work and working in collaboration with Full Circle, a learning disability theatre company based at ARC to create new and ambitious work devised completely by them. It felt like a small community and a hive of activity was bubbling and building. When founding Little Cog, we never dreamt we'd find a home in a venue but our work was both valued and validated, and so with incredible support and resources from ARC, and funding support from Spirit of 2012 Trust, Arts Council England and Stockton on Tees Borough Council, disabled peoples' voices were not only being heard in a regional venue, they were being championed, supported and celebrated.

Vici Wreford-Sinnott, Creative Lead, Cultural Shift

IMPACT

This was an incredible opportunity for Little Cog to test out a model of practice across a whole organisation that wanted to learn. The validation of the value of our contribution was transformational in how we viewed ourselves. We no longer felt on the margins of something but rather integral to culture.



What difference would having a better understanding of disabled-led work have on your organisation's programme of work? Are there audiences (in the broadest sense of that word) you are missing out on?

Models of Disability

There are several different ways of thinking about disability.

- The Charity Model is an outdated paternalistic approach begun in the 19th Century where disabled people have little agency and are beneficiaries of the 'good will' of others who know best. It's still a widely used model.
- The Medical Model of Disability focuses on an individual person's condition, viewing them as incapable of certain activities and as a 'broken' version of the human being. It is the most widely used model and many of our societal structures are based on it, which disadvantages disabled people.
- The Social Model of Disability was developed by disabled people and states that disability is created by the way society is organised, that it is the barriers and obstacles in society which are the disabling factor in disabled peoples' lives. These barriers create a lack of equal access and may also relate to attitudinal bias. The Social Model provides a framework and tools to improve disability equality.

What is Disabled-led practice?

- Ensuring the work is led by disabled people from conception to planning to delivery to evaluation. Diversity enriches the arts, and this must include disabled-led practice too.
- Viewing disabled artists as equals and resisting making assumptions that they will want to be incorporated into existing provision designed and delivered by non-disabled people.
- Challenging assumptions that conventional, or 'normative', ways of delivering the arts are the only way things can be done.
- Acknowledging that the stories of disabled people have been missing, and showcasing the socio-political, historical and cultural narratives of disabled people on stage, in galleries, on screens, and in publishing.
- Implementing new ways of working to make this a reality.

IMPACT

Understanding the Social Model of Disability was a critical part of shifting ARC's thinking and approach to disability. It reiterated that the change that was needed was on our side, we were responsible for the barriers – they weren't part of someone's condition.

IMPACT

ARC got to work with lots of amazing disabled people and artists because we understood what barriers existed and how to remove them. We also developed an artistic policy for programming disabled led work which helped embed our learning and increase visibility of our commitment. Disabled artists were involved at every level and contributed to new thinking and new practice, whilst being respected as equals.



Which model of disability do you think your organisation tends to think in? Are there any positive examples of working in a disabled-led way in your organisation? Or ways you've worked in the past that you could change?



Putting the art first

It was essential to ARC and Little Cog that artistic values and practice led the way. Based on ARC's experience of exciting disabled-led work, we wanted to challenge the absence of this work and make the artistic programme relevant to disabled people. Everyone involved in Cultural Shift agreed that art needed to be at the heart of our work to ensure that disability didn't become an 'add-on' or a separate area of work from the main artistic programme. ARC has a clear artistic policy about contemporary work which is relevant to the communities of ARC and whilst there is an important cultural history to disability, it was carefully woven into our work with relevance to how disabled people experience the world today.

We acknowledged which stories and people had been missing and addressed that through commissioning six new pieces of theatre, exhibitions, programming touring work by disabled artists and creating mentoring opportunities and residencies for disabled artists to develop new work at ARC.

We realised that everyone at ARC was an agent of change – the whole staff team and Board – it wasn't something for one single person to shoulder responsibility for.

The creation of new work also meant that disabled-led models were in action from the beginning and there was learning for both ARC on accessible processes and the stories and content needed, and for disabled artists, gaining experience of being resident in a venue and understanding how venues work.

IMPACT

33 disabled artists were supported by Cultural Shift, which created a space and a platform that for the first time was designed around the disabled artist, mitigating barriers and focusing on the art.



If you're at the beginnings of seeing disabled-led work, could your programmers make a conscious effort to see, for example, five new pieces? Could you do a baseline calculation of how many disabled artists or disabled-led pieces of work you've supported or programmed in a 12 month period? It's useful to have something to build from and measure change over time.





"There is no substitute for seeing the work. Presenting work at ARC right from the beginning of Cultural Shift gave everyone – Board, staff, audiences – the chance to see disabled work for themselves. It challenged their pre-conceptions about what to expect and was a critical part of the 'shift' we achieved."

ARC

"As disabled artists we have spent too long in the margins. Persuading programmers to see our work is always a challenge but our experience of producing work tells us that there is a demand for the work. When we toured Another England up to 80% of our audiences stayed for the Q&As afterwards which would sometimes last as long as the show!"

Little Cog





The need to be strategic and the importance of planning

It's important to think about and then identify the specific things you want to achieve. Write them down, make a plan and monitor progress. It's great to develop a Disability Equality Ethos Statement which allows you to reflect on the bigger ethical picture and acknowledge what has been missing in terms of disability in the past. Sometimes there are slightly uncomfortable things to look at as your organisation's knowledge grows about different models of disability, such as work that may have been programmed in the past. It's important to acknowledge this as part of growth and change.

We recognise that we were very lucky to be awarded a three-year grant to support this work. That said, all the work we did needed to be done and, had we not received a grant, we would have found other ways to achieve the same change, albeit at a slower pace. What arts organisations include in our programmes is a choice, and we can actively choose to spend our budgets differently, however small they are, building in disabled-led work and access to what we already have.

The work around disability equality is inter-connected across organisations. Consideration needs to be given to how to involve all departments, and decisions taken about what needs to come first, and what is realistic and manageable. It's good to be ambitious and crucial to start having conversations with disabled people from the beginning. It is not possible to guess what needs to happen in your area.

One important cornerstone of change is for everyone in your organisation to have Disability Equality Training (DET), always from a disabled person, which exposes the construction of contemporary notions of disability. This is notably different to Disability Awareness Training which is usually delivered by non-disabled people and focuses on individual conditions, often using outdated simulation exercises of different conditions. From the DET you can develop your own Disability Equality Ethos Statement, ensuring that everyone is on the same page with a new understanding.

Openly talking about disability demystifies the subject and Disability Equality Training gives everyone the confidence to talk about disability.

Whilst it's important to involve disabled people in your thinking and planning, they are not free educators. Mutually beneficial conversations are usual for artists and venues, but when you are asking disabled people for specialist knowledge it needs to be paid for. Not all disabled people have broader expertise or want to be educators. There are lots of disabled equality practitioners out there and many disabled-led organisations offer a range consultancy options.



Emily Wilkinson

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Governance, policy and practice

Priorities and Core Principles

We were not attempting an exercise in mainstreaming or inclusion because this suggests disabled people must be included in what is perceived to be normative culture. ARC actively choose not to use the word 'inclusion' as Cultural Shift was about creating a completely new model, not trying to make disabled people fit into something pre-built without their input. Rethinking what 'inclusion' means is a wider diversity point too.

Instead, we needed to make space for disabled culture. To be effective, disabled people needed to be leading, creating, instigating and contributing. This was not about empowering disabled people, but about empowering ARC and others to see what impact creating a more equality driven arts environment could have.

Our strategic approach included:

- Appointing a disabled person to creatively lead the project at a senior strategic level
- Ensuring that everyone at ARC and Little Cog understood they were agents of change
- Exploring and rewriting ARC's Artistic Policy to incorporate a disability equality ethos
- Increasing the presence and visibility of disabled people and disabled-led arts at ARC from the outset, within artistic and participatory programmes
- Making disability equality one of the core values at ARC
- Adopting and embedding the Social Model of Disability within ARC
- Having clear goals and an agile approach that allowed us to continually learn, reflect and change

IMPACT

ARC's Board going through DET training with Little Cog meant it was embedded at every level of the organisation. Approving the strategic plan also meant that aspirations became commitments that everyone was accountable for.



Thinking and reflection

Everyone embraced Cultural Shift as a dynamic and active process and recognised that it was time to learn and reflect. It was time to think about the core values of ARC and its relationship to its communities, and for Little Cog to reflect on its role in the region, whilst exploring and developing new methodologies.

Power

We acknowledged that there are power imbalances in the arts, often between venues and independent artists or groups. Disabled people have experienced a particular history of exclusion in arts and culture and so it was important to be mindful of how power works, and what measures can be introduced to respect the equality, expertise, and missing narratives. We examined how power is transferred to a disabled-led model through collaboration.

Board and Management Team

It was essential to have the support and involvement of the Board and management team, who were part of Cultural Shift in many ways. The Board got involved immediately – they came to see disabled-led work, they listened to presentations from disabled artists, they took part in the training, and monitored our progress as the project developed from our initial baselines to eventual outputs.



What are your strategic priorities around disability and diversity and the involvement of a range of communities in your work?

All about Access



Access begins by feeling welcomed by an organisation or in a venue, and this begins long before you even meet. It begins by knowing you are seen, that you have been considered and factored in, knowing you are expected to be there as an artist, staff member, participant or audience member. Buildings have histories and some of those histories you might not even be aware of, past experiences disabled people have had at a venue, programming choices, language used. But we do have to find ways to move forward.

Access is one of the mechanisms of disability equality – a largely technical mechanism removing obstacles and barriers in the systems and structures of the arts world to ensure the terms and conditions of engagement are equal for disabled people. It's been a legal requirement since the 1995 Disability Discrimination Act to make adjustments (meet access requirements) for disabled people. In the 21st Century, with 20-25% of the population composed of disabled people, access can no longer be a clunky, half-hearted add on.

Many venues now provide some BSL, audio described, captioned and relaxed work but it remains largely inconsistent across the sector. It's important but not by any means the whole picture. It can be complex to measure in terms of its impact but it must be noted that access needs to be factored in across the organisation, considered in terms of staff, artists and any participation activities as well as audiences.

Venues reading this may well be at different stages in their journeys and please be reassured that none of this is said to scare you off! It just means that it requires thought, planning, budgeting and conversations with disabled people. It's impossible to do everything all at once which means measuring what is realistic for you in your given circumstances, how you learn from your initial work and how you build on it. That's why developing a Disability Equality Ethos Statement is key, because it is bespoke and designed with relevance to you and your communities.

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“Audiences with access requirements find it easier to book appropriate seating as our staff are more aware of access around the building. We have improved our booking system so customers don’t have to explain their requirements when booking each time”

ARC Staff

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Structures and Systems – internal and external

Once an organisation has an improved understanding of the constructs of disability and the social barriers which prevent full participation and equality, it can explore its knowledge base and examine any entrenched attitudes which hold bias around disability. With support from a disabled professional, venues can think about their policies, information practices, communication methods and practices across all departments, what they are already getting right and where there is room to improve, both internally and externally.

Working with Disabled Artists

This does require some preparation and planning, to build confidence, knowledge, and awareness. Ultimately it is a human exchange where we get to ask each other questions with an agreed commitment to moving things forward. Training increases our awareness of the language we use, the processes we employ, lets us examine if there are transparent routes into our organisations and allows us to focus on what accessibility actually means and involves.

Audiences and Participants

We examine and consult on whether what we offer is accessible to audiences and potential participants in our projects and we can explore new practices in these areas.



Could you draft a hypothetical access budget for two different kinds of events? Locate your local access providers and get some quotes? This will support you to start adding visible access budget lines to your organisational budget.



Introduction to Directing, Photo credit Black Robin

The Cultural Shift Model

Cultural Shift developed strong foundations before seeking funds. ARC and Little Cog grew a project idea that built into a vision of a three-year programme with three strands of dynamic arts activity: **Creative Practice and Participation, Strategic Shift, and Learning and Sharing.**

Creative Practice and Participation

Art and Artists

Artistic work was central. Three new disabled led productions were created, two of which went on to tour nationally. Butterfly, Another England and Lighthouse created opportunities for professional co-productions highlighting accessible practices, developed Vici's artistic practice, created work for disabled actors, showcased access approaches and put the narratives and socio-political context of disabled people on stage.

Full Circle, our resident learning disabled theatre company, co-devised three productions with Little Cog reaching over 500 audience members. Los Muertos, Out of the Shadows and The Keepers saw their specific visual aesthetic develop and loyal audiences grow.

ARC's programming staff developed their knowledge of disabled artists and companies, to include more disabled led work in the programme. Artists and companies presented included Alison Carr, Alan Clay, Lisa Hammond, Hijinx, Mind the Gap, Sue Maclaine and Stopgap Dance Company. Staff are now proactive and confident in providing parity of service for disabled people.

Disabled artists were offered mentoring opportunities and residencies, including Pauline Heath, Rowan James, gobscure and Paul Wilshaw who came to ARC to develop their artistic practice.

IMPACT

2,449 audience members saw disabled-led work; BSL interpreted theatre and comedy performances were introduced; and subtitled and audio described films were also introduced into the cinema programme. We also began to research and deliver relaxed performances in our family programme, which helped us to better understand a wide range of audience requirements.



Could you start to put together a list of disabled artists whose work you admire or feel excited by, and could you extend this list by committing to watching a series of online works created by disabled artists?

Creative Practice and Participation Communitites

We felt passionately that everyone should have the opportunity to take part in arts activity. We designed some short-term introductory participation activities called ARCeology where disabled people new to ARC could explore a range of arts activities, and the building, which we connected into our longer term projects – for example creating lighting and décor for Arctic Piranha club nights.

We partnered with local organisations such as Steps and Stockton on Tees Borough Council to create some exciting training and mentoring for young learning-disabled adults. 45 Days to Find My Way resulted in portraiture exhibitions, animations, a devised drama show, and flash mobs in the centre of town.

A group of amazing learning-disabled planners and DJs co-created Arctic Piranha club nights which were all held at ARC with a new theme, cocktail/mocktail and food menu for each night. Sometimes they would book bands and other times they'd share the DJing. Each club night was like a takeover until everyone eventually felt like they were part of the fibre of the venue.

Hundreds of young disabled people were provided with the opportunity to explore their creativity, their place in the world and what their futures may bring.

IMPACT

The ARCTIC Piranha planning group continued to run (with a break during the height of the pandemic) and are now designing a huge event for summer 2022. Several project participants became full members of Full Circle theatre company after receiving mentoring from the company for a year.



Could you build a relationship with local learning-disabled people and ask what they'd like to see at your venue? Shows, opportunities, social nights – how could you support a disabled-led approach to this? And how do you make this a consistent offer – eg are there Christmas or other seasonal events you could invite people to – reduced price tickets or PWYD schemes?

Strategic Shift Organisational Development

It was critical to embed the new learning across ARC. Cultural Shift was endorsed and actively supported by ARC's Board of Trustees. Everyone was involved and kept updated at staff meetings. Managers were supported with disability equality in the contexts of their specific departments



Disability Equality Training

Everyone in the organisation took part in Disability Equality Training (DET) which is now repeated annually for new staff members and a refresher course is currently being designed. DET introduces organisations to what they must do to introduce equal working practices. It also creates an understanding of the cultural and historical context within which negative perceptions of disability have been developed and perpetuated in the arts. This is essential to understanding what consideration needs to be given to artistic content of work programmed and delivered across the organisation. The staff team were also offered BSL training and the front of house team given touch tour training. The technical department built their knowledge about access features and audio-description equipment was installed in the cinema.

Processes and Policy

It was inevitable that once we had explored how to be more accessible to disabled people in all areas of an organisation, policy and practice changes would need to be made. We did this gradually over time, and our time frame coincided with a review of the staff handbook at ARC which allowed for lots of conversations and planning, with new accessible measures in place for recruitment, induction, communication, training and much more.

Programming, Development and Commissioning

ARC's artistic policy was reviewed and a new section on disabled-led work was included. This has recently been reviewed again to keep everything up to date and clear for anyone thinking of approaching ARC about their work. ARC tends not to programme work it hasn't had a hand in supporting the development of, allowing them to get to know the artists and the work. This is a brilliant model for disabled artists as they are welcomed into the organisation. A database of disabled artists was developed and a proactive approach taken to see more work by disabled artists. Through the Disability Equality Training, adoption of the Social Model and seeing more work ARC took policy decisions about publicising their support for disabled artists, putting measures in place to reach more people with opportunities and factoring access into their applications processes.

A Ripple Effect

The activity at ARC created a lively hub of new work, new connections and new narratives coming to the fore. As ARC is such a proactive venue, involved in, often leading, several networks there were opportunities to share our practice with other colleagues. ARC actively encouraged partners, peers and artists to explore disability equality. We were also invited by the British Council to share our model with European arts leaders. We remain excited to share our work to see how it might transfer to other settings.

IMPACT

ARC now has the language to be able to confidently reach out to disabled people, we understand what the barriers to working, attending events or taking part in activity at ARC could be and we have policies in place to allow everyone to enjoy visiting and working with us. Disabled artists feel confident that they are coming to a space that understands them, where access is asked about in advance and they can just get on with making work.



Could your organisation create a Disability Equality Ethos Statement?
Could you arrange some DET and create a statement acknowledging what has been missing and some initial actions?



Introduction to Directing, Photo credit Black Robin

Learning and Sharing



Occupation. Photo credit Black Robin

At the end of the funded project, we held the Cultural Shift Conviva. This disabled-led event saw people from arts organisations and the disability arts sector attending a full day symposium that involved disabled artists and practitioners talking about the context of disabled-led practice and the work to be done in wider cultural contexts.

It was an exciting gathering of disabled artists and venues packed with information from disabled artists who had taken part, films from the 45 Days flash mob and Full Circle, creative and punchy provocations from artists and break out discussions on key themes from the project. We shared a taster of Another England which was in development and had a brilliant performance provocation from live artist Tammy Reynolds. Deborah Williams from Creative Diversity Network gave a powerful keynote speech about our absence from culture and the need for increased representation from all communities within disability.

“Provocations that were actually provocative, scratch performances that genuinely left you wanting more, insightful breakout sessions and cake.... This didn’t feel like just another disability arts conference. It had a distinctively Northern flavour with some new voices.” Joe Turnbull, Disability Arts Online



Could you sign up for the Disability Arts Online weekly newsletter and check in with their extensive website on the important topics within disability? Could you list your job vacancies with them? We’ve included their website details on our Top Tips page.

What's happened since?

Once the Cultural Shift project ended, we made a commitment to continue our work. These are some of the things that have happened since the project concluded. A dynamic, rich world has grown from Cultural Shift.

Art and Supporting Disabled Artists

Disabled-led work has a place at ARC and many disabled artists such as gobscore, Pauline Heath, Aidan Moesby and Black Robin have found a home at ARC for residencies and support to develop and tour new work. Disabled artists have continued to be programmed, including digitally during the pandemic, so well embedded is ARC's understanding of and commitment to spaces that work for everyone. ARC recently reviewed and refreshed its disabled-led work policy which is available to read on the ARC website.

Little Cog has gone on to create new work, including digital work during the pandemic such as BBC commissioned Hen Night and radio commission The UnSung. Vici has a script in development with the possibility of a new disabled-led mainstage piece for the region. Little Cog responded quickly to the pandemic and created some disabled artist commissions, delivered a series of masterclasses, created a comedy writing room and provided mentoring to a number of disabled artists.

Disconsortia – we held a round table conversation for disabled artists from the North East during Cultural Shift out of which grew Disconsortia, a disabled artist-led collective working to raise the profile of disabled artists across all artforms in our region, which Little Cog and ARC continue to support.

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“Buildings have histories and I’m sorry but if you do programme something with awful content, that does stay with people.

You do have to demonstrate you’re listening and want to learn, but there is joy and a buzz around this community – not tragic and misery making – powerful and punchy.

Yes sometimes political but my goodness someone has to hold the powers that be to account!”

Little Cog

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Creative Communities

Full Circle became an independent company from Council-run day services and is now a resident company at ARC. In 2019 they developed a small touring network and then were commissioned by Stockton International Riverside Festival to make an outdoor show which will premiere in 2022.

The ARCTIC Piranha Club Nights Group have reimagined their events and will now present one large scale event per year. The group continue to meet fortnightly and visit other events created for disabled people to bring best practice back to ARC.

Strategic Shift

Diversity and intersectionality – ARC has applied its learning from Cultural Shift to wider work around diversity and intersectionality, addressing barriers that other groups face using similar methodologies.

Confidence – Cultural Shift has given ARC Board and staff confidence to speak up about disability, to challenge practice within and beyond the organisation.

Knowledge – ARC Board and staff have made an ongoing commitment to continue building our knowledge and educating ourselves about disability equality and disability arts work. It’s built into our strategic plans so it never drops off the agenda.

Disability Equality Training, Ethos Statement Development and Planning – DET continues to be offered on a consultancy basis to arts venues and organisations to support their development through Little Cog. We seek to influence the arts infrastructure, regionally and nationally, to engage with disability equality improvement models.



Arctic Piranha Club Night. Photo Credit Black Robin



Dissemination and Learning

Crucial conversations – Little Cog has represented the area in a number regional, national and international fora, appeared on many panels, given keynote speeches, provided provocations for discussions and hosted supportive conversations with disabled artists. Resources have also been developed relating to Access Statements, an access guide for online meetings and information on the Social Model of Disability. The pandemic has rocked the arts world and significantly impacted on budgets and new possibilities. However, there was a lot of learning about equality and accessibility from online working. We can't lose this progress, or leave disabled artists and audiences behind, as we attempt to safely return to real world work and the development of new 'hybrids'.

Train the Trainers was training offered by Disconsortia to disabled artists interested in improving their Disability Equality knowledge with a view to becoming trainers themselves.

On Whose Shoulders We Build is a new living archive of disability arts in the North East, past and present. For the first time a body of largely hidden work has been brought together by disabled artist Black Robin supported by ARC and Little Cog, funded by Arts Council. A community is visible. www.onwhoseshoulders.com

Sharing with peers and demystifying disability – we developed something unique and we must tell people about it so that work like this isn't regarded as a one off and the preserve of a few beacon spaces – it rolls out and it ripples... it's not a compromise, it's not a risk, it's exciting and allows the fullest possible picture, brings new audiences to venues, is better for everyone, but it does need to be well managed and well supported, as there are sensitivities.

IMPACT

Making work accessible for disabled communities is now at the heart of everything we do, it's not an add on, it's embedded.



Who are you going to contact first about making some plans for disability equality?



45 Days to Find My Way, Surprise Stockton. Photo Credit Black Robin

Top tips

Change has to start somewhere and it would be great if that was sooner rather than later. Here are our tips for where to start:

- Get disability equality training from a disabled expert for everyone in your organisation
- Sign up for the Disability Arts Online (DAO) weekly newsletter and check out the directory on their website
- Do some research into the history of Disability Arts at National Disability Arts Collection and Archive (NDACA) and the newly developing North East Living Archive of Disability Arts On Whose Shoulders We Build
- Find some of the disabled artists in your area and get to know them and their work
- Check out some of the disabled-led content online or book to see a disabled-led show either online or in person
- Start putting a clear and comprehensive plan in place and ensure it's not an 'add-on'. Develop your Disability Equality Ethos Statement. Write it down and share it with everyone in your organisation

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“This project has increased my faith it is possible and not difficult – the more people we can tell how not difficult it is the better”

ARC Staff

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Conclusion

For our model to be at its most effective, a multi-strand approach with clearly articulated aims and outcomes was essential. This must be informed by disabled people, and as you have seen cannot focus solely on accessibility. It is important to fully appreciate the levels at which exclusion exists. Many unintentional barriers exist because organisations just aren't aware of them, and some of them relate to practices and processes which are easy to adapt once you have the right information and support. It's all about taking the first steps which bring a new confidence as many things about disability become demystified. We have experienced real change at a number of levels and continue to be driven by the energy and excellent work this creates.

IMPACT

For Little Cog and disabled artists: we have experienced what it feels like to have our work and our voices supported, valued and developed within a venue which was committed to change and which continues to hold open conversations about actively welcoming and involving artists from all communities. Many of us have never experienced this before but it is truly transformational on many levels, both personal and professional. Our work has often played to sell out audiences and has allowed a really thriving community to grow in ways that shouldn't be exceptional but it has taken working to this Cultural Shift Model to show what is possible.

IMPACT

ARC is a richer place as a result of Cultural Shift. We are hearing new voices and stories, benefitting from new skills and perspectives, and connecting with communities that were previously ignored. All of this has been achieved through growing our own confidence, challenging our preconceptions and ultimately, working with disabled people as equals.

Pledge

We hope you've found the information and questions in this guide useful. What three things - however small or simple - could you commit to do in 2022 to start your own 'cultural shift'?

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Arctic Piranha Club Night. Photo Credit Black Robin

CULTURAL * SH/FT

ARC

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