

# Barriers to Access Launch Event – a reflection

Hosted by Birds of Paradise, Glasgow

1<sup>st</sup> December 2016

The Gold room was abuzz as it gradually filled with over 50 artists, practitioners and arts organisations from all over Scotland. They had all come with an ambition to gather, learn from each other, to find solutions and ultimately to engage more young disabled people in the arts activities that they offer.

Dotting around the room I asked a few participants, in advance of everything starting, what they hoped to get out of the day.

- More knowledge
- 'We feel like we've done all the right things but we're still not engaging young disabled people. What else can we be doing?'
- Networking
- Actions to take away
- New ideas
- Ways to make existing structures more accessible
- Seeing examples
- How do we engage more young disabled people?

The space was comfortably held by Robert and Mairi who reminded us about the informality and importance of the day.

Colin Bradie, from Creative Scotland, told us about the Time to Shine program, which had funded the Barriers to Access research, and some of the other initiatives being used to achieve the ambitions outlined in Creative Scotland's Youth Arts Strategy.

While Dr Matson Lawrence began to introduce us to the *Barriers to Access* report copies were seamlessly deposited on our tables for distribution. We told who'd been involved, what barriers had been identified and then what some of the solutions could be to some the barriers highlighted.

Lawrence outlined the 5 main barriers to participation were:

1. Finding suitable arts provision
2. Availability of access information
3. Lack of provision for access and support
4. Travel, transport and location
5. Attitudes and awareness of arts providers

Each of these barriers were expanded further, as outlined in the report.

We then had an opportunity to hear directly from two of the research participants, Flic and Amy. Both young women told us about their experiences in being involved in arts activity and what it was like to be part of the research.

Flic talked about how she had acquired her disability fairly recently and had been heavily involved in Scottish Youth Theatre activity as a non-disabled teenager. She really clearly felt now, as a young disabled person, that she probably wouldn't have done that. I found this profound and disturbing as a reflection and I felt disappointed in the system.

Amy talked about how important someone meeting her to guide her into a venue is. She highlighted, as a young blind woman, the anxiety she often feels 'en route' to arts activities wondering if someone really will be there to meet her and show her where to go.

Transport and physically accessing a space were some of the major issues highlighted by both of these articulate young women. It highlighted to me how globally we need to be thinking about the experience of engagement for young disabled people.

Just before we had a break I asked the participants 'What was resonating for them?'

Some of the responses were:

- 'I hadn't thought about what a huge barriers getting there could be'
- Having heard from these two participants, how had the voices of young people with profound and multiple disabilities also been captured?
- 'What about people with invisible disabilities? Are they also in the report and being thought about today?'
- 'In organising an accessible event like this, are there things that we could be learning from organisations such as National Union of Students?' (who only allow deaf clapping or a single click rather than applause in case loud sudden noise disturbs anyone in the audience)

Other participants went straight into action mode:

- 'We need to be more upfront about the provision we have available'
- 'Access information should be more explicit on our website and in our marketing'
- 'Should we just be asking everyone about access requirements and what they need?'
- 'With the willingness and enthusiasm everyone in this room is indicating, why aren't we moving forward?'

The conversations continued over a short tea break.

When we all returned there was a short session to reflect on what has and is being achieved in Scotland.

Before we got into the nitty gritty Robert and Mairi reminded us that there are many young disabled people who aren't able to articulate what their access requirements are, even if they're asked, either because their disability is newly acquired or because they might be unfamiliar with an artistic environment and are therefore unsure of exactly what they might need in the situation. They told us that in the past they have worked with disabled artists to produce their own access statements which clearly outlines what they might need, in most situations.

Through a brilliant exercise about postcodes and describing where we lived to someone else, they illustrated very clearly to us that 'it's about what you're asking not about what you already know'.

We then went on to hear Best Practice examples from people in the room. We heard about an accessible Cultural Centre being built in Glasgow, a bespoke traineeship that's been established for one young person, an 'accidental' progression route was discovered for another individual and a Welcoming Culture is being cultivated within an arts organisation.

In this session, it was also acknowledged that inclusivity is not exclusive to disability. There is much discussion happening at the moment around the establishment of gender neutrality, specifically in relation to toilets within venues, and also connected to access for parents and babies, at events such as this.

Just before we broke for lunch we were reminded to check the coloured dots on our name tags we'd been given when we arrived and asked that we sit at the table that matched our colour when we returned from lunch.

After lunch we were given the fantastic opportunity to hear from Julia Samuels and Shauna Hogan from Liverpool based drama and performance company, 20 stories High. Julia gave a fantastically informative presentation about how they work as a company and explained that all the work they devise and generate, all the stories they tell, come from the participants in the room. She also gave some great examples of young people progressing from workshops they might do in locals schools, to becoming part of the young performing company and progressing on to be part of the professional

company that makes and tours work. This idea of telling the 'stories that are in the room' made me remember David Grieg talking about writing and making 'for the troupe'.

Shauna shared her experience of being a participant in the young company and talked about what that meant for her.

After thanking the speakers, Robert and Mairi reminded us that it was now our turn to do some work! In our colour coded groups we were asked to write down 4 actions based on the following parameters:

- What needs to happen in order for us to progress further?
- Needs to be an activity that isn't currently happening
- NOT an aim or ambition but an ACTION!

In our groups we were given 10 minutes to come up with our actions. Everyone became very animated with no shortage of ideas being generated. These were then shared with the whole group and Mairi started to group the thoughts and post its being shared.

8 themes, or central actions, seemed to naturally appear. These 8 central actions, written on large pieces of paper, were then distributed to the groups for further interrogation and development. We needed to become more practical about the actions – what was needed, who needed to be involved/connected, what might the budget be etc.

Midway through the exercise our original pages were whisked away and replaced by one of the other central actions. We were then asked to pick up were to other group had left off.

While we were beavering away in our colour coded working groups, the 8 centralised actions were being entered into the computer. Our next job was to prioritise them via our smart phones and various other technologies. Are about 10 minutes three very clear priorities emerged:

**M and R CAN YOU INSERT THE TOP 3 PRIORITIES HERE PLEASE**

It was an incredibly quick and efficient way of coming up with a prioritised list of actions from an incredibly diverse group of people without anyone having to collate anything. It was clear and immediate what the group felt should happen next.

Feeling very satisfied with ourselves the one last thing to do was get some participant feedback. Again, using our available technologies, for very simple evaluation questions were asked of the whole group.

The questions were:

- One word you would use to describe today overall
- One thing you've learnt or discovered today
- One thing you'll investigate further
- One action you'll take or thing you'll do differently as a result of being here today.

As each question was asked in turn, participants responses appeared on the screen. It was an incredibly fascinating and engaging way to evaluate an event. Responses were shared but still anonymous. We joked that it was like watching the election results but much less disappointing.

People were also given the opportunity to feedback anything that could have improved the day for them but no responses were received.

Overall, this was a fantastic event that was incredibly well organised and led by Birds of Paradise. I think all those that attended felt like their time had been well spent and that they were part of something bigger that will go on to change the artistic landscape in Scotland even further.

## Responses given on Post-Its or PoPs

*One word you would use to describe today overall*

Empowering

Reflective

Informative

Productive

Thought provoking

Thought provoking

Informative

Vital

Informative

Expansive

Motivating

*One thing you've learnt or discovered today*

What sort of barriers people are facing

'Disabled people are not expected'

The barriers that artists face

Ways to approach accessibility training without claiming to be an 'expert' with the 'answers'

That PhD students get PAID (!) more than some people who actually work in arts organisations

Putting access lines in all our budgets, outside of BSL and captioning. There are other barriers that need to be addressed in large organisations budget lines

*One thing you'll investigate further*

Training

Possibility of a new role of door person at venue, to welcome all customers and offer any support needed

I'd like to learn more about how Birds of Paradise works

What the specific need for Upfront Network is, in context of the wider sector.

How can we be connected and support so conversations all build to same goals

Role models and representation at grassroots – local - national

*One action you'll take or thing you'll do differently as a result of being here today.*

Research more

Raise status of this work amongst wider staff team and speak to diversity team

Look underneath

To get involved with other companies/organisations that work with Youth Arts  
National Youth Arts have a weekend event in March – going to join, attend  
and learn from it.

I will write my work's manifesto and be unapologetic about what it is for, for  
partners, funders and venues.

Lobby for further accessibility and access within shadow/trainee roles

Ask groups/organisations to bring their young people to get their voices

*These ones aren't labelled so I'm not sure where they go....*

Birds of Paradise to strategise a 10 year plan to address barriers to arts  
(might already be doing this?)

Family and children interactive events to change perspective

Training/mentorship support to work with people with additional needs (for  
people who don't identify as having them)

(We need to offer) opportunities from birth

Strengthening family relationships with the Young Person + parent  
+organisation

Targeted outreach programmes for specific demographics

Seeing disabled artists at high levels of success

Limiting actions to 8 (and therefore having to consolidate different points)  
may mean distinct ideas or initiatives are lost

Today was very well facilitated. Well done and thank you.