



## Stage Captions

Louisa McDaid MA, MTh, MSc  
NRCPD registered / Stagertext trained

Theatre & Arts Captioning | Lipspeaking  
Electronic Notetaking | Level 6 BSL

w: [www.stagecaptions.co.uk](http://www.stagecaptions.co.uk), m: 07837 622229

Event: "Artists Making Accessible Theatre"

Date: Friday, April 24, 2020

Time: From 14:00 am

Facilitators: Robert Softley Gale, Andy Edwards

Remote Captioner: Louisa McDaid

**Key:** '>>' denotes captioner unable to identify speaker.

### [ beginning of transcript ]

**Robert Softley Gale:** Hi, how are you all? That works better than I thought it would. We are going to wait a few minutes for anyone else to come along. I will post some rules into the group so we all love a wee bit of rules don't we?

They are in the chat window. I will give you a minute or two and then we will start so we are not repeating ourselves over and over. Nobody wants that.

**Natalie MacDonald:** Anyone using me?

**Robert Softley Gale:** If anyone is using BSL give a wave! Not yet.

I will post the rules again. Just checking we are all working. And they still keep coming.

**Natalie MacDonald:** How do I pin two people?

**Robert Softley Gale:** You can't. If they want to speak to you directly they can use the chat window. Let me check that. Speak among yourselves, folks! Obviously don't speak! Callum has you on mute. Good for me!

Great. Hi Mairi. Good to see you. We still have some people joining so we will give it another minute and then kick off!

**Natalie MacDonald:** We are just working out seeing EJ as well as Petre. They have managed it.

**Robert Softley Gale:** Okay, I think we can kick off. I have posted the rules into the chat box. If anyone isn't sure of anything, feel free to give me or Callum or Andy a chat and ask us whatever we can do to help. I am sure we can, all four of us, make this work! We are trying to do it as sensibly as possible so bear with us, if anyone can't hear me well give a yell or wave at me, but I can't see everyone at once

because we have a few people.

Kicking off now - thank you very much for coming along to this, we have been doing a bit of online connecting with people and trying to keep the sector connected in terms of disabled artists but this is the first time we have done some focused work. This will be a challenge but we will see how this works. Better?

**Natalie MacDonald:** Your audio is going.

**Robert Softley Gale:** Someone is saying they can't hear anything either. Let's see how this goes. We are working in partnership with Andy Edwards who has made some accessible work himself, so we are... can people mute if you are not speaking?

Everyone should now be muted. If you are not, please do so. That will make it a bit quicker. There are so many of you it's hard to keep you all muted. I have a few more. We have been working with Andy to bring this event to you and to work with other people. Let's kick it off and see how this goes and where we end up. Andy, do you want to take over and talk about what you are thinking?

**Andy Edwards:** That is me on mute! Lovely to see you all. As Rob said, I am Andy, a theatre-maker and a writer based in Glasgow and have some experience of working with accessibility theatre. Me and Robert sat down a wee while ago with an idea to get a bunch of people together with an interest in that field of work, whether they have made work or it's the first step thinking about access on stage. If we were to go around this group and ask you to group yourselves that would be the entire two hour session! So I will introduce you to each other, we have directors and makers and producers and actors and more. There are people with experience of staging productions in black box space and doing international touring and regional touring. This may be a first time for some engaging with access and for others it is a consistent or fundamental part of their experience of theatre. But you are equally welcome and we are excited to have this range of people in some space.

I will facilitate but we will run through the ground rules - stick your hand up to say something or use the zoom button and we will try and get round as many as

possible. I will mute myself if not speaking as it improves sound quality and also improves active listening. With that in mind it may affect the pace of conversation but don't be afraid of spaces because it's a necessary part of thinking and processing. At times we may cut you off or round up, please don't take this personally, as we are not trying to end what you are saying but there are so many here and we want to stick to the agenda.

If you had something and don't know what to do with it, stick it in the chat and Callum will be moderating that and we will get back to it at the end of the session. You don't HAVE to speak, being here is a form of participation in itself. If you would rather send an email afterwards that is totally okay.

We will cover the questions we will be working on. There will be two halves, the first half will be about 40 minutes long, talking about the work you make and the access needs and the context in which you work and then focusing on the challenges of making accessible work and what support would be helpful going forward. We will introduce questions and explain those questions and then split into two breakout rooms posted by myself and Rob, that is done automatically and we will place people who need BSL or captioning into the appropriate space.

To kick off, we will roll the first two questions together - who are you and what work do you make? To get a flavour of who you are, what audiences do you typically work with. The second question, is more in-depth, for 10-15 minutes - what does making accessible theatre mean to you and your practice? You can substitute the word practice for discipline and job, etc. We want you to think about your relationship to access and what it means in your context, when did you first encounter access and have you made accessible work in the past, what motivated you to join this today who do you want to access your work, where does your access take place, on stage, in production or rehearsal or elsewhere? By way of example, I am a playwright based in Glasgow, working on small scale projects and am particularly interested in integrated access, where in my practice audio description and BSL are written into the first drafts and are irremovable from the resulting piece of work. This has led me naturally to making work about those means of access, such as British Sign Language interpretation and audio description and access from my perspective, is a creative process but also the subject of a lot of the work I make. That is a little bit. We will split into the two

breakout rooms. Can you fire us in the various directions?

**Robert Softley Gale:** If you end up in a room without the access needs you have, I will fix that in a minute! Hopefully this will work!

### [ workshop 1 ]

>> Hi!

>> Hello!

>> Don't know if Callum can hear us or not? Are you on mute?

**Callum:** I can hear you!

**Robert Softley Gale:** It worked well but I forget to come myself! Welcome to this group. I hope everyone has got what they need but let me see.

**Callum:** I am dealing with the captioning question.

**Robert Softley Gale:** It's to look at the initial questions in this group. Who are you and what sort of work do you make? this idea of scale, and who you make work for. IF we can keep this short and quick, give us a sense of who is in the room and what sort of work you make and how are you starting to make that accessible. Raise a hand to go first? Anyone? If you don't volunteer, I will volunteer you. Geraldine?

**Geraldine:** I am Geraldine, I do lots of different things, I make theatre and film and music and am interested in working with kids but also a range of different community groups and the scale is more community orientated and often participatory and not such big scale theatre. I came through participating in youth theatre and that is where I started thinking about access.

**Robert Softley Gale:** Claire!

**Claire:** I am Claire and I make theatre. I am a musician and I use that a lot in my

work and I tend to make collaborative work mostly with young audiences, smaller to mid-scale. I trained as a clown so a lot of my work is physical and visual with less text. I co-made Assisted Suicide, the musical, a show with Liz Carr, a large scale piece that toured a lot of different venues. I became more aware of venues and ways of making work and how work can be accessible in the rehearsal room and the audiences. I am currently working with Imagine to make a piece for young audiences with complex needs and this is something I am interested in.

**Robert Softley Gale:** It's fine if you don't want to speak but anyone who wants to talk...

**Nicholas:** I am Nick! I am a theatre-maker and a facilitator and sometimes with professional artists and non professionals. I am based in Glasgow and work across the UK and sometimes beyond. The scale is small and occasionally mid, and I think, I tend to work with young folk at the moment. That tends to be in contexts where the needs of the room are really diverse. I think a lot about what that is ... how the process of accessibility can manifest itself in the final product.

**Callum:** Is there anyone else who wants to go next whilst Rob is sorting something out?

**Eve:** I am Eve, a playwright and director working in theatres across Scotland with text and music led stuff. My approach to access is that I am really interested in making every performance accessible and not just the one off but finding challenges of getting that within the bigger organisations I work with where every penny is getting watched so carefully!

**Robert Softley Gale:** Anyone else?

**Vince:** I am Vince, a dancer. Mainly a dancer with ballad but last year I had to make my own work and this year will make more work collaboratively. Most of my work is with young audiences and I think accessibility, the simple things, like you were saying, that ALL theatres should be accessible and simple things that should have been done decades ago. The specific needs of various groups is really good. Don't know what I am saying now! {laughter}

**Robert Softley Gale:** Anyone else?

**Nelly:** I am a playwright and a drag performer working in the artists development team at NTS, I am really interested in how to make my own art accessible but also I am kind of trying to learn as much as I can... I only started the N.T.S job in January and am interested in finding ways to instil that desire in that work.

**Robert Softley Gale:** Anyone else?

**Jen:** I am Jen, a playwright and director and dramaturg and sometimes spoken work performer. My work is small scale, I sometimes cross over into actor training and am interested in finding ways to help actors with complex needs into the industry. My most recent piece was with BoP, experimenting with new ways to notate theatre to more easily accommodate the neuro divergent brain and that continues in lockdown.

**Robert Softley Gale:** Sonya, then Emma.

**Sonya:** I mostly work with puppets as a maker and designer and puppeteer and I work as a performer. I am currently working with Cutting Edge, doing the puppetry direction for their up-coming in the further future show, I am doing puppetry direction with a group with additional support needs. I started enjoying it as a way of communicating on other ways than social norms, with kids. But I am really enjoying the possibilities of puppetry to establish other types of communication, I am curious to start working with puppetry and dementia. That is me!

**Emma:** Hiya! My name is Emma. I am a dancer and theatre-maker and in my own work it's intimate and small scale and with young audiences in non-traditional spaces and a movement director in very traditional mood scale spaces, and also in advocacy spaces a lot. I am frustrated by being in rooms full of people who don't even know the right questions to ask rather than making everything more accessible. I am also training as an intimacy coordinator and I find it interesting that accessibility and sex aren't being talked about a lot! I am really excited to be here and go into these training room to ask how we can make sure intimacy is accessible from the get-go rather than as an add on.

**Robert Softley Gale:** Anyone else?

Greg!

**Greg:** I am Greg, a musician and a performance artist. I have made, I guess, some work that has had accessibility at the forefront. Mostly around d/Deaf accessibility. Also because I have worked collaboratively with children and young people in most of my work, involving young people with additional support needs, I found that a really useful democratic way for me to approach making my work accessible, to work with people who have their own access needs as equal partners in the work. I always question whether I am doing enough! I would like reassurance today but also to learn what more I can do!

**Robert Softley Gale:** Great. Are we doing enough - probably not! Anyone else? Moving onto ... sorry, Sheena.

**Sheena:** I am an independent producer who has worked with Claire Cunningham, a disabled artist based in Glasgow, for 4 years and have learned a lot about accessibility through that and it also runs through my work. But there is always more to learn and as a freelancer you can end up in a silo so I am interested to learn from others and update my skills and knowledge.

**Robert Softley Gale:** The next question, what accessible theatre means to you. Some have covered this a bit - we are talking about captioning and BSL/English interpreting and relaxed performances. Can anyone talk about what being accessible would mean to them and their context? Stunned silence!

**Geraldine:** I won't always start!

I think that... I should have waited until I'd formed the whole thought! I thought what Gregg and Sheena said about not knowing if you are doing enough, I have found that really interesting and frustrating and exciting is that different access needs often contradict each other so I don't know if it's possible to make fully inclusive theatre but that doesn't mean we should not strive to do so! I am interested in how we start changing things so you don't have to request your need,

you can assume it will be met. I don't know if that IS possible because there are so many different things but once we start to think about responsibility, that the responsibility doesn't always rely on the person, it becomes the responsibility of the provider.

**Robert Softley Gale:** We talk a lot about pre-emptive access. There is always a balance, there will be stuff that you can't pre-empt and you have to respond to requests but you CAN pre-empt some things, a ramp and a BSL interpreter are almost always a given. Anyone else? What does access in your context mean to you?

**Geraldine:** What is an intimacy coordinator?

I don't know what this. It's helpful to know the terminology.

>> It's a movement director but for intimate scenes, ie, full on simulated sex or in some cultures, even male and female hands touching, it can cover any touch within theatre and you are there to safeguard everyone involved. Currently the big conversation is around simulated sex and how we do that safely.

**Geraldine:** I wasn't sure if that was theatre specific or a life thing.

**Robert Softley Gale:** Anyone else?

**Nick:** Thinking specifically about making work that young people perform in, sometimes I feel my role becomes advocacy and educating other young people about what that experience is, and why we are doing it THIS way rather than what might be perceived to an 11 year old, the straightforward way. We have all been saying at the organisation, this is why we need to be doing it this way. Can you help us?

**Robert Softley Gale:** Can you give an example of that?

**Nick:** We had a huge battle with appropriate break out space. Things like that. What gets put in the room next to us, why that huge event probably isn't right when we have this specific group with these two individuals with these needs. And

the number of bodies in the room, responsible care giving and that. All of those things in a section of a working theatre that traditionally now is add on anyway? So you are having to really... sometimes I struggle to get £50 for props let alone pay for another member of staff! it's those things, speaking generally.

**Robert Softley Gale:** Great! Anyone else?

**Emma:** For me there are two sides, one is the work itself and how it's presented, whether it's accessible to different audiences. I have a real rub up point with who is in the rehearsal room, at design stage, there is basic design issues that would impact who is in the space. I am doing a lot of work around failure right now. Happy to work with anyone who is happy being together but not sure how to communicate that in a way that disabled performers know it's their space and it's about coming together and the spaces will be tailored to whoever is there.

**Robert Softley Gale:** There is something about giving an explicit indication to people, you can say something is open to everyone, and we all do that! But when a lot of disabled people hear that, they think everyone else who is not me! There is something about saying, "Actually, we mean YOU." About 10 years ago, with the Scottish Arts Council, we launched a fund for disability arts, and about 78 people applied who had never applied to the arts council before, and that is because we said it was for them! There is something about being explicit that has a real power. We are going back to the main group and the same group will break out later on and can pick up some of this stuff.

See you back there in one minute.

**Robert Softley Gale;** Hi there, welcome back. I feel I have chucked you out of a room against your will but hey ho! We will wait for everyone to get back in. We are now all back in! Great. Andy?

**Andy:** We had some technical difficulties for a fair bit of time and didn't get much time to talk through things but people were talking about different contexts in which to make access, Tim spoke about his work as a visual designer, working within captioning as a creative part of the work, the different stages he can do that within a project and his work on access within the different productions. And Andy

Arnold at the Tron talking about his journey working with a d/Deaf BSL artist and how that influenced his work at the Tron and his own creative work.

**Robert Softley Gale:** Talking about what access means, and being clear about communication, what people need and pre-empting access requirements and how to communicate that to the people you are in a building with, or the people in the space. We had some suggestions and also how it was difficult to overcome.

**Andy:** We will crack on. Question 3. We want to think about how would or does a more inclusive approach change the way you work in logistical and financial and creative ways, answers can be speculative and also about what experience you have. Do you need additional resources, time, where might you need to seek guidance and what spaces would you end up using, how do you connect the work to those audience,

Can we take 10-15 minutes for this. We are going back into the groups.

**Robert Softley Gale:** Underlying the meeting for those at BoP is a question of how we can help. We are keen not to become the owners of accessible theatre. We do things in a certain way, we mess up and try other things. But we have a role in supporting people. In this conversation I am looking for how we can support people. What we can do to support you, if there is anything, let's hear what that is.

Going back into the room.

You all went into separate rooms so I will bring you back together and we will do that again!

Here we go! Getting you into two rooms! Is there anything you want to ask, Andy?

## [ workshop 2 ]

**Robert Softley Gale:** That was the most intense one minute of my life that I will never get back. Okay! Can everyone hear me okay? Okay, super! Thank you. let's kick off on that question about what support - how would a more inclusive approach change the way you work? What resources do you need to be more

inclusive? Who wants to go first? Where is Geraldine?

Anyone?

>> Hello! My question is something that was really interesting, having BSL and audio description interpreters in the room. It was when you are devising a new piece, how do you accommodate translation for the interpreters for it to mean the same in our speech in terms of BSL? So, I am wondering if anyone had that experience of working with interpreters and how do you access that and what do you need to know when writing, developing and directing a piece that needs to be interpreted?

**Robert Softley Gale:** It's a really difficult area. I took a one man show to Brazil about 5-6 years ago. And there was a line, the word 'spastic' came into it and as usual my comedic approach to making fun of myself. But in Brazil, in Portuguese it was hard to find that equivalent and we spent a lot of time working on that. Devoting someone to that role so that interpretation isn't just the writer's job but it became someone else's job in that situation. It can be a big job depending on how text heavy you are and the language you are going to, it can be difficult

>> It's how you access that, how you find someone, in a way. Because you asked what additional resources we would need. What would be the steps to include that, is that something you do before you get the script together? At what stage and who would you contact?

>> The earlier the better because it's a complex part of the process, we would include a BSL interpreting from the get-go and that is very resource intensive and costs a lot. There are various national databases of BSL interpreters and also language interpreters. It would be about contacting the people who would know best. From an artistic point of view, I always try and use the BSL interpreter who fits best with what I want to create. I want an interpreter because they have a certain quality about them I want to put in the production, in the same way I cast any production. For Purposeless Movements, Amy Cheskin, the interpreter - the fact she was young and female was very purposeful because the rest of us were men and the gender issue was something I wanted to look at.

There are lists of BSL interpreters I can send round but if you are looking for a particular interpreter for a particular job, talk to me and other interpreters, tell them what you are looking for and they may say, so and so will be better for that gig. We are good at signposting to other people.

>> The last thing - what additional resources do you need to offer and support for interpreters, if you are directing and writing?

**Robert Softley Gale:** If you think about a BSL interpreter, they are taking a whole script and translating into another language, for another spoken language you would give them 1-2 weeks to work on that and you would pay them for that time. A lot of BSL interpreters will be flexible with that and try to do what they can but we have to recognise what we are asking for. We are asking for a lot of work that we need to recompense for. That is two weeks pay and recognition that they need the script two weeks before anyone else.

What other resources do you need? What are the barriers stopping you making accessible work?

>> There is something for me around budgets. Firstly, I am trying to think of "blue skies", what would be helpful for me as a freelance producer and one would be an example of budgets for companies that call themselves accessible theatre-makers and specialise in supporting the work of disabled artists. That would be helpful for me to see how access requirements are budgeted for and articulated to the funder and to see how much money is put aside. As a learning primarily.

And for me, the ability ... the funds is the be all and end all but I struggle with articulating and I don't know if there is way to articulate the need for £1-2k put aside for a project, to Creative Scotland, because there is something about encountering a challenge , whether for the artists involved or the audiences, if you don't have the money to support the idea you either eat into the contingency whereas you should have been able to pre-empt that, or you say, that will be great for the next time we do that. Then you budget for the next iteration rather than create space to hold. That is really challenging for me working across both R&Ds, and the presentation of the work. There is something about being able to effectively create about the need for the resource rather than having to fight for it.

That chimes with the comment about not making people with access needs having to fight for access but the provider creating a she'll of support for that. there is something about it being understood that if you are asking for £1-2k under extra access costs that is appropriate for the scale of the project. So there is something about the learning around the figures and also the understanding or a conversation to partake in sector wide about how we segregate funds to best support artists and audiences to develop audience requirements.

**Robert Softley Gale:** For people with protected access requirements, has anyone had it refused?

>> I don't think so. It's been small if I ever put something in, ie, £200 to support extra time in a venue for a relaxed performance tech rehearsal. That was a rough figure but not as vague as what I am talking about.

**Robert Softley Gale:** I would be happy to share a budget. I can't speak on behalf of Creative Scotland – although I obviously wish I could! - but I imagine they would say to put it in and they will take a look. I haven't heard of anyone having access requests refused so as long as you have a rationale, they probably won't refuse. From what I can see, if we have a good thinking behind it, even if it's a catch all pot of money that can be responsive, at least we are appreciating why it has to be responsive, that feels valid. I would ask people to put it into the budget.

>> Thank you for that. That was really helpful.

**Robert Softley Gale:** any funder can be inconsistent. I know that ... people have experienced but what I have noticed is that people are asking how we get the money and they are told to ask for it. I think we have to ask for it.

Anyone else? What is stopping you from making more accessible work? What is getting in the way of that? Great.

**Greg:** This is not to excuse myself because as I said earlier, I do think I personally could be doing a lot more in terms of making my work accessible but I do find the barriers are often outwith my control. I was going to be taking a show to the Fringe this year, and in the application was really thinking about accessibility but

some of the things I wanted to include to make the piece accessible weren't going to be accessible within that venue. it's not necessarily their fault because sometimes it was about the physical space - they don't have that for break out rooms and tricky things for audio description. I do wonder if there should be more onus on the organisations. It's great to hear freelancers say they want to make more accessible work but if we are going to get closed doors in venue. I am personally struggling to know ... am I going to be able to make work in the future? It would be nice to think we would be going into venues who also had soul searching and deep thoughts, are they thinking about having access officers who can guide the freelancers they work with? So much of the onus is on the individual artist.

**Robert Softley Gale:** I will come back to you in a second. Everyone is sort of saying, it's them! Venues say they support artists in what they want to do and I agree that venues need to do more and provide more. I wonder how we get everyone around the table where the artists want to make the work more accessible and the venues have to or want to. Why do we keep hitting walls when we all want to make it happen? Some of it is because it's difficult but some of it is because ... I don't know!

**Stephanie:** The point I wanted to make, to piggyback off Greg's point: for me the reason it's so difficult is that not everyone wants to make it better and some are so resistant in their place of privilege that they are not thinking about other people. A lot of this falls back onto freelance artists. The example of the Fringe structure of making work and requesting the venues get behind the artist and support them, but for me there is something about organisations, building based or not, getting behind the freelancers because a lot of the challenges I face, it's not about asking the venue about this and them saying they can't do it. If I am the freelancer what can also be a barrier is when I go to my employer and theatre company and say this isn't happening and I need the board to step in and say they want to stand by this, oftentimes what happens is that even if I feel so passionate about this, regardless of whether I have the time and the research, I need people just to sign off on it - I can go back to the theatre company and ask them to sign off, and go back to the venue, sometimes even the organisation will say, we don't have the time for that and that doesn't feel as important, even if they are making work about access! For me, one of the many reasons it's so difficult - as much as we want to

say we are behind the good fight, I don't think we are and I think people are really good at paying lip service and freelancers have to wear the values the organisation say they have to move the discourse further.

**Robert Softley Gale:** I hear that. I think I still have this optimistic side of me that thinks that people must be all good and behind this. a bit of me wants to hold onto the belief that we are all in this together but I accept that some aren't and that is maybe the barrier. The question then becomes, if we ignore the folk getting in the way, are there enough folk to make it happen? Can we get on with it together and make something happen together? It does require venues and some are difficult but some are okay. Is that a way to approach it? Or are they all bastards?

We have two minutes left. Anyone else want to raise anything, about the things getting in the way?

**Geradline:** Sometimes WE are the people getting in the way - able bodied makers trying to make it accessible for others. Stop trying to make your work accessible and support someone else! I feel at the moment I am excited for the potential for more radicalised political action, about sorting it on a bigger scale rather than making venues accessible. We have the energy and now we are in such a strange flux of things, that hopefully people are looking at their organisations and buildings and thinking deeper about what that means. Let's not go back to normal. I am super optimistic and think we need to take to the streets with the placards. I am interested in moving into a position where we support people who don't have the privilege we have, taking that time and effort and support someone else?

**Nick:** I want sure if I wanted to say, but you pushed me so I will. it's really exciting that we are a room of people who decide we won't shut the door but there are absolutely people who slam the door and run. That is kind of okay, as well? Not someone I would want to work with but those people are doing the thing. I fully agree that we are holding ourselves back. There are freelancers with a limited opportunity to be creative and have to do the thing they know, so the space for failure is significantly reduced. That spills out about a creative risk, and this comes at such an ingrained high level.

It's about competition as well - we look side to side and just compare, which is a real problem and no-one wants to put themselves out there and really make a mess in order to get somewhere.

**Robert Softley Gale:** I guess that is where I recognise our privilege as a funded company. We can use risk and try things that other companies cannot try. If we can use that privilege to help you, let me know.

I think we are almost all back. Are we all back? We will have a 10 minute break now. Come back the 3.25 and we will kick off from there. Come back in 10 minutes. Thank you.

[ break ]

**Robert Softley Gale:** We are gradually coming back. I will give it another minute or so. Welcome back to those coming back.

I think we are almost all back.

We will kick off again. You won't be split into groups again, you will be glad to know. I would encourage you still to keep participating even in a bigger group. If you are not comfortable asking questions stick it into the chat box and message us directly. We started to speak about the actual barriers to creating accessible work, the issues of having the right budgets and knowing how to articulate access in budgets, how to get venues and artists working together so access isn't see as the problem as one or the other, but they can work together. Some interesting things came up.

Now the thing to put to you all -how do we move forward, how can the Scottish sector work together and what is required to move things forward? Any ideas?

>> To follow on what we were saying in our group, it's about a cultural shift, I agree with that. 3 years when I learned about the social model and I passed that onto my company, it opened their eyes and they were outraged they hadn't learned about it sooner, it helped centralise them and help them move forward in making work as young people. I have used the social model to explain diversity in

general, it's way more expansive than the context it's currently living in. To have campaigns about making it mandatory in the same way that venues make sure staff have First Aid training and are also now moving towards the same with mental health training, I think the social model training should be the same.

**Robert Softley Gale:** Can you say what you mean by the social model?

>> When it was taught to me, I spoke to Jess Thom, and it was that thinking of disabilities are defined by circumstance and environment and it's the social responsibility. The best definition she gave me is that someone's disability could be a switch that is on/off depending on the environment you are in and it's not a constant characteristic. If you are a wheelchair user in an environment where there are ramps everywhere and no stairs, then you are not disabled. That is the definition she gave me. It's the decentralisation of yourself and your needs and thinking about the environment and your assumptions as a society, how have we designed a world where others aren't considered, so the onus isn't on the individual.

**Robert Softley Gale:** What we find remarkable, we first started speaking about this model of delivering training about 15 years ago and yet we are still having to speak about it and people are still amazed by it! That suggests it's still a big barrier if people are still finding that out now as a new piece of information. And yet we are all here today because we recognise that barriers exist within the Arts and we have a job in dismantling barriers. We have already bought into it in some ways but by articulating it in that way we can understand it differently. That suggests there is training needed for venues and artists and everyone in the Arts, that disability training still has a big part to play. We should take that point forward.

At BoP we now have a bank of young people who deliver training for us and are paid for that. I got tired and too old to keep doing it. IF anyone wants to get involved in this group in becoming a trainer, do get in touch because we are always looking for more. If anyone would like to be part of a training session we can organise that.

Anyone else? Any other barriers that you see? Any other things stopping you being more accessible in making work that we or someone else could help with?

**Gavin:** One of the things I raised in the break out room was the fact that coming at this from a performer's perspective, if you are going to be involved in a relaxed performance, I actually think usually what happens is that you get the run through the day before the performance and as a performer that doesn't really work. On the day of the performance, if you only run through it the day before you don't really get used to the changes made. For example, you might expect a certain sound cue and it's not there or you forget it's a relaxed performance and think something has happened! Just being able to run through the show, with the changes more than a couple of times would really help performers. Having an autism or dementia friendly consultant in development sessions and they can sit with the cast to explain their findings a lot earlier on, would really help performers.

**Robert Softley Gale:** There is something wider in there about relaxed performances being given the right space and time rather than being done quickly. I wonder if there is guidance around this we can help bring together so that people have something to fall back on. I will go away and think about that, about them being well resourced before they happen.

**EJ:** We were talking about barriers and when we have sorted one barrier, that is fine but it doesn't always happen continuously. It's about teaching d/Deaf and disability awareness and you teach one group and then that group leave and you have a new group and have to start the process all over again. Some of the staff are great and open minded and others are just there for box ticking and want to keep working in the way they're used to. Sometimes attitudes are the problem. They have ticked the box but the barriers are always there. We need a strong force. We need a constant movement and group of understanding coming in behind to be the force behind that.

**Robert Softley Gale:** That is why we are keen to build up the ground swell of young people and older disabled artists. In this group we have 30 odd people where we would not have had this number before. That gives me a bit of hope we have that ground swell beginning to happen, that we are that ground swell.

>> I guess, in terms of if there is stuff Birds of Paradise could do, two things I am

interested in the possibilities of - one being coming up with models to start a conversation around accessibility with people from the get go, working with creative places and production companies in Scotland, often being asked what the accessibility needs are. I am interested in if there are ways we can stretch out models that give options, that open up a conversation rather than being asked to detail your accessibility needs to me and we will fulfil them. From my own accessibility and working with people and working with a cast recently with a lot of accessibility needs, I have been having conversations about how overwhelming that feels and the pressure and stress that creates. So I am interested in how we welcome people into the discussion rather than ask them to detail that to us!

The other thing, I am particularly interested in is how those with access needs can advocate for others with access needs. I have social access needs, how to work with them at the NTS in a context where you can advocate well for others. IF there is a possibility to have training on that sort of thing, how to make sure your own access needs are being met whilst catering for the access needs of others.

**Robert Softley Gale:** We could do that easily. Everyone we work with gets a questionnaire to ask what their access needs are, that isn't really around disability but every individual having access needs, ie, caring responsibilities, or whether it IS about disability, we try and encapsulate that all together. We try and give a lot of examples, because people are used to covering up their access needs, and pretending they are okay. By giving examples, we are saying it's okay. We could use that form, that we have been using for a number of years, it's a bit daunting to some now because it lists so many access needs but it could be useful to start the conversation. And something about being able to support each other as disabled practitioners I find interesting. I always go back to the idea, everyone has access needs, in every rehearsal room. If we approach it that way, it doesn't become individualised but about how we make that rehearsal room work the best possible way. Anyone else? Any other ways we can help each other or from BoP?

**Emma Jane:** I am thinking on something that Geraldine phrased really beautifully about sometimes being able to get out of the way is actually the best things you can do. Normally if I can advocate for someone or refer a job onto someone else, but even with collaboration slow built relationships are the reasons you end up collaborating. It's rare that I work with disabled practitioners and I would therefore

suggest that people call Birds of Paradise but I wonder where the spaces are to be in the room and form those practitioners so there is less division between disabled and non-disabled. Sometimes we come together and have four weeks to figure each other out creatively as well as with the access needs.

**Robert Softley Gale:** That is part of the network challenge. it's hard because at the moment we have to reinvent so much and we don't know what those networks will be like after this! But we need them and we need them to be accessible, that is very important. Anyone else?

**Hannah:** It was to piggyback off what Emma said there. If you have that platform and forum for everyone to share within that, that also offers up a lot of space for artists with access needs to say to artists making accessible work, to say what they need if going to the theatre to see something as an audience member as well as what they need as a performer. It would be valuable to have this shared space.

**Robert Softley Gale:** Can I bring Callum in on this, around access statements at NTS?

**Callum:** We got brought in, to run a session which Geraldine and Stephanie were both present at, basically breaking down the questions we have in an access statement. We did the disability equality training and looking at the statistics around impairments, the idea that accessibility to venues often means only level access and not much more! We looked at scenarios where if you are working in a situation and someone you are working with has access requirements how can you remove those barriers? There are ideal ways and realistic ways constrained by the venue or budget. Geraldine gave us a very hard scenario of a Deafblind person. It was looking at why we collect the access requirements and who we are sharing that with, how we make sure the staff working on the project know enough information but not more than the need to know. IF an access requirement is that a person doesn't want to be emailed before 11am everyone on the project needs to know that but there may be some parts of the access statement they don't need to know.

**Robert Softley Gale:** Andy, do you want to introduce the final question around where we go next? We have 10 minutes to go. We have a question around

whether this is a group that wants to keep coming together?

**Andy:** What we want to ask is whether the group is useful, is it useful to meet again in this space or in a physical space? What is missing from this conversation right now? Is there anything you want to talk about regarding making accessible work, suggestions for starting points next time?

**Geraldine:** I think... in the other group I spoke loads there, but there is more politics to be brought into it. At the moment we are talking about individual arts practice and how we make theatre but for these things to change in a bigger way, the push is for that, having the chance to talk about it from a political stand point and looking at that, we need to shift the conversation so that it's everyone's responsibility.

**Andy:** Great. What is the point of doing this? And I think that politics ties into that big shift. Anyone else?

**Stephanie:** A massive yes to what Geraldine said but also it would be helpful to have these conversations again. I was pretty frustrated by the tech issues cos we want everything to be as inclusive as possible. I think it's really important to come together and I feel I would really benefit from a space like this to connect. I attended the access statement workshop at N.T.S, and it was really helpful to have space to talk about hypotheticals and real-life scenarios I was going through. Sometimes BoP does things that are great and sometimes things don't work, I think it would be helpful to have a space to talk publicly about failures because there is something about the shame of doing something wrong particularly in this context, and holding the responsibility as a producer. It would be helpful to have that conversation about the intention to do better and share that so others can feed in and it's not a closed evaluation context but as it's happening and I think this is the right context to do that equitably in.

**Andy:** I think having that space to try stuff out has come out in the break outs I have been in.

**Briony:** I guess I was thinking about useful methods of sharing practice, it's been great to have so many on this call but I don't feel we are specifically in the theatre

world so I don't feel that I have got to know everyone and their contexts. When we go through the process of making something and including the access things we can think of, we don't necessarily take the time to write it down afterwards. We reflect on it internally but don't have a case study that could be shared, what went well and what was weird, what the resource was, a case study can feel emotion less and we haven't necessarily had the time to do that. But that sharing of experiences could be a short cutted way to share knowledge and that seems to be a key theme that people are interested in, knowledge around the ethics and politics and also practical hints and tips. That was a reflection.

**Robert Softley Gale:** We will gather that together and email it around everyone. We have your contact details and will ensure you get whatever. If you have anything to share to that group send it to us and we will send it round.

**Andy:** You signed into zoom and we have your email addresses. I will CC emails to everyone, as a standard but it might be nice to have it as an open CC. If anyone doesn't want to be normal CC'd and want to be/stay, CC'd, email that to be separately and I will keep your email address hidden otherwise I will open it up so we can see everyone's email addresses.

**Robert Softley Gale:** There may be another event where we get people to speak on specific topics. There might be one on captioning and best practice for that and why it doesn't replace BSL. Then another one around resources. And one around giving time and space to fail. we have been holding back a bit in terms of offering bursaries because we didn't know the right thing to but if you have ideas for ways we can support you please come to us for that conversation. We have managed to finish on time. There is a questionnaire we are going to send round for feedback and to ask other questions, to get a sense of how it went.

Anything else you want to add, Andy?

**Andy:** No. Thank you for showing up. Amazing to have such a big turn out. Lovely to see. Thank you for coming along and please fill in the questionnaire. Your thoughts on keeping this conversation going forward, would be great to hear your thoughts.

**Robert Softley Gale:** Thank you for coming along. We will be in touch very soon and I hope you have a wonderful Friday night of drink and whatever else you do! Goodbye.

**[ end of transcript ]**