

# Curious Minds

## Access and Inclusion

Alternative Saturday Jobs

# Summary Findings

## Access & Inclusion Model, Alternative Saturday Jobs

### Introduction

Access and inclusion are priorities both for individual organisations and place-based partnerships. Drawing on our successful [Alternative Saturday Jobs](#) model, our ambition was to explore a place-based approach to improving access and inclusion by drawing on the lived experience of young people from the local area.

This document outlines how we approached this and shares the learning from across the programme. We hope to encourage others to continue the conversation by sharing some tried and tested tools to use, either as an individual organisations or as a partnership.

We recognise that there is a wide spectrum of needs to be considered when creating a fully inclusive and accessible environment. For the purposes of this document, we are focussing on access and inclusion through a SEND and neurodivergence lens. In this document we use the term SEND as well as neurodivergence. Traditionally, SEND stands for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities and is a well recognised term (hence it's use), but we recognise that it can be limiting and doesn't always encompass all experiences.

### What we did

Taking inspiration from [Ramps on the Moon](#), we wanted to explore access and inclusion from a place of lived experience; looking at how youth employment opportunities can make a meaningful contribution to improving access and inclusion for others. So, working with partners [Mind the Gap](#) and [Totally Inclusive People](#), we identified how our successful Alternative Saturday Jobs model could be adapted for this purpose. This resulted in a model where young people with lived experience of SEND were employed as *Access and Inclusion Champions* across their local area.

As *Access and Inclusion Champions*, the young people audited four local arts and cultural organisations that were part of a place-based partnership. The Champions looked beyond the physical space, considering the whole package on offer from an organisation - not just a participatory activity or the building itself. They were supported throughout the process by a Mentor, who focussed on supporting their individual needs and helping them to carry out the required tasks. Each organisation received a three-stage action plan which recognised their existing strengths and offered suggestions on how they could make improvements.

At the end of this process, each place-based partnership held a strategic conversation, facilitated by Curious Minds and Totally Inclusive People. The aim was to share the learning right across the partnership organisations and to create a joined-up approach to improving

access and inclusion for children and young people. This ensured that youth voice was involved in helping to develop and improve access and inclusion, not just within individual organisations but across the wider local area too.

In practice, the model outlined here operated differently in each area. It was important that it should be flexible to the needs of the individual young person first and foremost. Other differences came about because of the individual organisations involved and how the wider partnership was set up and how they wanted to engage.

### Who was involved

Following an open call for North West place-based partnerships, the participating areas were:

- Ellesmere Port Cultural Learning Exchange.
- Bolton Cultural Education Partnership.
- Pendle Local Cultural Education Partnership.
- MADE, Manchester's local cultural education partnership.

The organisations involved within each partnership included theatres, museums, music services and libraries, amongst others. Within each partnership there was a nominated organisation which was the employer. They directly recruited and employed a young person who identified as having lived experience of SEND - the definition of which was open to their interpretation.

## What did we learn?

In reviewing the discussions held by the partnerships, together with the individual reflections of the young people and employers, we were able to identify the following summary themes.

### Comms & Marketing

This was one of the biggest learning points for all the Champions and the partnerships involved. We identified the need for arts and cultural organisation to be proactive, not reactive, when advertising and sharing information about an opportunity or activity. This means that individuals do not waste precious energy trying to work out if something is accessible for them; they can make that decision early on and use their energy to take part in and enjoy the experience.

*Key suggestions from the Champions are:*

- Better use of visual and audio guides to help people find and move around the building comfortably. For example, filming the journey from the nearest public transport to the venue on a mobile phone and narrating what you see or hear, number of steps involved, signage and landmarks to help navigate. Another example given was a guide to moving

around the building, so people know where the nearest accessible toilets are, where the lift and stairs are, and other key information.

- For written guides and signage, don't use heavily stylised fonts. Anything with fancy lines, embellishments or serifs will not be readable for everyone. Keep it simple and clear.
- Some people are happy to talk to staff and ask questions if something is not clear. Some people will not be. The key is not forcing social interactions to happen because the information isn't there or isn't clear.

*"We just need to know information about what to expect, so we can be informed as individuals, parents and carers."*

One partnership discussed exploring how they could co-design accessible signage with young people, to be used across all local venues, so that it is recognisable and familiar wherever a person chooses to access arts and culture.

### **Sensory Engagement**

This came across in the majority of the audits. Examples given included the impact of unexpected noises as part of a museum exhibition, being 'forced' into a space with lots of noise or echoes, and the importance of how loud the music is.

*"How do we build a sense of anticipation and excitement without fear?"*

*Key suggestions from the Champions are:*

- Consider whether background music is really needed. Is natural noise, including people talking, enough?
- If you have ear defenders available at your venue or event, have them out and available to use without making people ask for them.
- If you have a sensory experience that includes touch - especially with materials such as velvet - make sure that gloves are provided.
- If you have visual displays that could be triggering, then ensure that signage is prominent to make people aware beforehand. Also, consider how this information can be shared on the website as well, so people can be aware before even entering the building.

### **Engagement**

Each Champion was asked to audit access and inclusion for participatory activities with children and young people as part of their role. Drawing on their own experience of taking

part, as well as that of family and friends, they were able to make suggestions to improve wider engagement.

*Key suggestions from the Champions are:*

- Consider using generally inclusive language, such as *'quiet hour for those that would benefit'* rather than using specific language or labels which might exclude others, such as a *'quiet hour for autism'*.
- Create relaxed performances for performers as well as audiences. A key part of this is communicating what 'relaxed' means for both groups of people.
- Invite families to share information ahead of time about their child's access needs and create appropriate mechanisms for responding to this. One organisation in particular noticed the overall improvement this change had for everyone taking part.

*"Both professional and personal experiences inform our practice – everything is just as valid!"*

## Employment

By creating employment opportunities for neurodiverse young people, one of the organic outcomes was to learn more about inclusive employment practice. During reflective conversations, the employers stated how you need to build in time and energy to adapt to the person in front of you. This is a two-way learning process and both sides need to be prepared to learn.

*Suggestions from both Champions and employers:*

- Communication platforms don't need to be the conventional methods, such as email. Explore using more relaxed platforms, such as Discord or WhatsApp, as they feel more familiar for those new to the world of work and can carry out the same communication function as email.
- Recognise that things are often done 'to' a young person with SEND, and that this opportunity might be the first time they take responsibility for organising themselves. It's a learning process for time and task management.
- Establish inclusive and accessible recruitment and employment practice across the whole organisation, not just for employing young people.

## Accountability

Ultimately it was felt that none of this would be worthwhile without ensuring that accountability was embedded throughout individual organisations and the wider partnership.

*Key suggestions from the Champions are:*

- The responsibility for access and inclusion doesn't sit with one person. The learning must be shared so that everyone is working towards creating an inclusive and accessible environment on a day-to-day basis.
- Hold focus groups with your audience about their needs. These should be on a regular basis to check-in, revise existing plans and consider new challenges. They should not be a one-off tick box exercise.
- Adopt an agreed strategic approach to access and inclusion and state your aims and ambitions in a public way – such as on your website(s).

In one example, access and inclusion will be a standing agenda item for every partnership meeting going forward as a result of this programme.

## **Moving Forward...**

We hope that the learning from this programme has inspired you to take action within your own organisation, your place-based partnership or both.

As well as reflecting on these findings, we are sharing the tools we have created to help you move the conversation forward.

These are:

- Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Access (EDIA) Audit for Place Based Partnerships
- Audit tool used by the Access and Inclusion Champions as part of Alternative Saturday Jobs.

These were created for a specific purpose, outlined below, so please feel free to adapt them to your needs and setting. You might choose to focus on one of these areas initially. Please focus on what's relevant to you.

### **Audit Tool for the Access and Inclusion Champions**

This tool was created for young people with lived experience of SEND and/or neurodivergence. It was designed to help them consider the whole experience of engaging with an arts organisation from start to finish and what that felt like for them personally.

### **Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Access (EDIA) Audit for Place Based Partnerships**

This audit tool was originally put together for local cultural education partnerships (LCEPs) to look at EDIA across the partnership. It focuses on how you work together and how you work across your local area.

There are three levels to work at depending on your starting point:

- *Foundation* – these are the basics from which build your practice and partnership working.
- *Delivery* – looking at the work you are delivering as a place-based partnership and how well you are addressing EDIA in that space, encouraging you to push yourselves further.
- *Strategic* – how to embed this agenda strategically into your partnership, ensuring that diverse voices are heard higher up the ladder, at the point of decision making or policy, leadership of the partnership.

## Final Questions

As a final prompt, we invite you to consider the same questions we asked each of the organisations and partnerships involved in this programme:

- What are the small changes you can make this week?
- What are the bigger changes that you can work towards in the future?

*“Access and inclusion stuff can be simple and inexpensive – small things make a huge difference.”*