



Invisible Disabilities: A report on removing barriers for artists and delegates with Invisible Disabilities from attending Showcase and Festival events

Commissioned by Pavilion Dance South West, UK

Report Summary

Second Hand Dance is a disabled-led dance company driven with care by Artistic Director Rosie Heafford and Executive Producer Claire Summerfield. Established in 2013, we create touring shows and digital dance experiences for children and adults. Based in England our work has a growing international profile as well as local and regional impact. We have toured the globe – from the UK to Europe, China, Canada, and the USA.

As the company grew and opportunities to tour, create and present increased, Rosie also began to experience chronic pain and fatigue that presented barriers to her working. After a long, medicalised journey of diagnosis and acceptance, in 2017, Rosie began to identify as disabled as defined by the social model of disability. The conditions and expectations of working in the performance industry, in particular long working hours and travel, impact on her health and pain levels and exclude her from participating. This is especially apparent at festivals and showcases where days are long with intense schedules.

In 2019, Surf the Wave commissioned a research project through its Curatorial Voice Programme, specifically designed to provide a space for dance programmers to discuss approaches to access that enable inclusivity, to think about change and to instigate new ways of working.

There were 3 questions central to this research:

- How can we better enable artists with access needs to get the best experience possible when touring work, particularly in relation to

festivals and showcases where the artist has less control over their environment?

- What guidance is available, or what parameters are there, for the amount of access support artists can claim from funders?
- How can artists with invisible disabilities communicate their needs clearly?

Invisible Disabilities

According to a US survey, 74% of the billion people worldwide living with disabilities, do not have a visible impairment that immediately identifies them as disabled. Their challenges are less evident and therefore understanding their needs can be problematic.

The Social Model of Disability

Developed by disabled people, this model states that disability is created by physical, organisational and attitudinal barriers. That they are disabled because of these barriers and not because of their impairment or difference. The social model advocates for society to identify and eliminate these barriers thus enabling disabled people to be included and enjoy more independence, choice and control. More information can be found here https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_model_of_disability

Initial Research

During spring and early summer 2020 Second Hand Dance undertook the first phase research of this project, Invisible Disabilities: Festivals and Showcases. We conducted seven interviews with individuals across the cultural sector in UK including artists, festival directors, producers, directors of development agencies, choreographers and chief executives. 70% of those interviewed identified as disabled. Those invited to take part were chosen due to their leadership area within a particular sector specialism i.e. programming festivals of international work for young audiences; strategic responsibility for showcasing and internationalism within the ACE NPO portfolio; disabled artists with experience of

attending or presenting work at festivals and showcases, and finally thought leaders specialising in Disability Rights and equitable access.

This research as led to the following recommendations:

Selection Panels:

- Introduce targets around disability and including work made by disabled artists.
- Make the application process accessible to disabled artists; think about how and where you advertise, the language and formats you choose, and the application format and schedule– are the timings achievable for disabled artists with chronic fatigue?
- Consider how disabled artists on selection panels can themselves participate in the opportunity being presented.

Before the event

- Add access as a standing item on every festival meeting agenda and embed it into your planning. Take responsibility for assessing access.
- Consult with everyone, artists and delegates about their access needs **early on** to fully participate. How can you gather access needs of artists and delegates at the point of booking? Be open about what you can support. Allow time in your schedules to have these conversations to prepare for what you need to provide. Treat each person individually, as they will have specific needs.
- Consider your base minimum access considerations (interpreters, alternative seating, quiet space etc) – what can you provide as standard and what can you add in if needed? Can you support access costs as part of your core budget?
- Be aware that people have multiple types of impairment and that many of these can be invisible. Try to treat each disability equally in how you provide for them.

- Think carefully about the physical spaces in your venue and how they can be used by disabled artists and delegates – quiet spaces (are they comfortable?), lunch spaces, back up spaces. Consider where they are located, so they are accessible. Are there enough seating areas in all public spaces?
- Think carefully about networking activities – these are often events that disabled artists and delegates miss out on. What time of day are they held? (Often evenings can be the most problematic for those with chronic pain or fatigue conditions). Could you have events timed at different points in the day to cater for a variety of needs? Is the sound good enough? Is it too loud? Is there accessible seating? Are there too many people all invited at once? Can you make the events smaller? Provide clear information to artists and delegates about events to inform their decision making – what is the event?
- Consider the routes between festival locations and whether this is a barrier for disabled artists and delegates.
- Send venue information in advance with full addresses of locations, suggested routes, maps and provide a guide to the terrain – is it hilly? Are there cobbled streets?
- Brief all staff involved in the festival (including core team, front of house, catering, security) – this is essential. Ensure your staff know that there may be disabled artists and delegates attending the event and that they may have specific needs. Encourage them be open, welcoming and mindful of everyone's needs.

- Ensure staff are aware of disabled artists involved in the event and any specific needs in advance. If necessary, write this information down or store it securely online, so it is easily available to staff.
- Consider if additional training is needed for staff or if they need individual access plans to create the most accessible working environment for themselves.

Schedules

- Have schedules confirmed/released ideally 4 weeks in advance, as this will help people with disabilities to plan their time and raise any concerns early. In the UK some disabled artists are able to apply for Access To Work funding to cover travel costs such as taxis or a support worker to travel with them – for international travel this needs to be done ahead of time with a clear schedule to base plans on.
- Consider issuing a hard copy of the schedule (with clear visuals of locations) as opposed to only online.
- Support longer or staggered get-in times, rather than a ‘one size fits all’ approach. Consider tech time the week before to allow for rest leading up to the performance.
- Build in rest times for both artists and delegates as part of the schedule to avoid disabled artists having to ‘miss out’.
- Try not to pack everything in and consider the needs of disabled artists to attend networking events, other performances, drinks etc. Discuss this with them when putting together your schedule.

- Have a Plan B with alternative options in case a disabled artist is unable to perform or participate. For example, switch to digital presentation or re-schedule to another day.

Throughout the event

- Continue dialogue with your disabled artists and delegates. Have ongoing conversations and stay responsive to their needs – can you provide extra cushions or a mat to lie down at a venue?
- Provide rest spaces and comfortable seating in the festival hub or networking/conference spaces.
- Check in on travel requirements between venues – can you offer to book a taxi if needed?
- Ensure disabled artists and delegates have the name and contact details of someone in case there is a problem.
- Consider offering an additional ticket to networking events for a support worker or companion to go in addition to the disabled artist / delegate.
- Could you provide a bursary to cover access costs for a support worker to attend the festival?
- Ensure dietary requirements are met.

After the event:

- Encourage feedback from disabled artists and delegates. Have a conversation with them about what worked or didn't go so well.
- Take responsibility for areas where provision was insufficient. Take steps to initiate the changes needed in discussion with the disabled artist and/or delegate.

N.B. This document is a working document. It is designed as a prompt for reflection about how you, the showcase or festival, might improve on our suggestions. The best way to increase accessibility is to work with disabled people in your teams.

We'd love to hear your feedback and any areas of best practice you were able to implement. If you'd like additional consultation on how to make your festival, showcase or event more accessible to those with invisible disabilities please contact Claire Summerfield/Rosie Heafford, Second Hand Dance, via admin@secondhanddance.co.uk

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