

HIGHLIGHTS OF ODYSSEY EVENT PANEL DISCUSSION

Facilitator: Michèle Taylor

Panel members: Helena Bibby (Cheltenham Festivals – Elevate partner), Carla Bull (Leadership course participant), Julie Green (Art Bridge Evolve artist), Jo Leahy (SVA – Elevate partner), Alisdair Shepherd (Art Bridge Evolve artist & Leadership course participant)

TOPICS DISCUSSED, SUMMARY OF ANSWERS & QUOTES

What panel members were finding challenging, which motivated involvement:

Artists

- Feeling isolated
- Not being able to work on a large scale (lack of studio space)
- Problems in life preventing arts practice

“the Art Bridge project recognised the potential for helping me to get through these barriers and practice my vocation too”

Organisations & arts leaders

- Not having worked with people facing disabling barriers before; the need to learn
- No cohesive plan for improvement around access and inclusion
- Not a high enough profile for what was being done
- Challenges around perceptions of your organisation
- Uncomfortable sense of isolation for artists with disabilities (or not with disabilities)
- To make the organisation more open / accessible for all types of people
- As per the universal design principles, integrating a wider diversity of people into existing programmes
- To push and challenge yourself as an organisation

How Art Bridge Evolve and Elevate helped artists move past blocks or challenges:

Artists

- A shared studio space enabling work on a larger scale
- Suggestions and encouragement from Art Bridge Evolve’s Artist-in-Residence (resulting in working on a more ambitious scale)
- Dedicated time to create / finish work (e.g. the 2-day weekend intensive)
- Working alongside peers

“...going to Art Shape, it was like, a connection of all different people...and you could pretty much do anything you like there”.

Organisations & arts leaders

- Working collaboratively with another organisation towards a plan
- Thinking practically about what can be done in a building that’s not currently fully physically accessible (including the need to be open and honest about that on access information pages)

"We very much want...everything we do, to be completely accessible to all and we need to talk more about what it is we are doing now, and so working with Art Shape has just been really good at bringing all of those things together, so that we can then work out how we can progress things forward"

Key things learnt or better understood about inclusive practice:

Arts leaders

- The need to change fundamental perceptions
- How you can change a way of thinking to help other people

"I've never been involved with inclusivity before...it was almost sort of otherness to me, I was sort of removed from it, and now...I just feel that I'm constantly changing my way of thinking about things"

Organisations

- To structure the thinking about what you're doing and why; to ensure projects (with diverse artists / participation) have integrity
- Learning about the social model of disability (*"that is something like a lightbulb in my head in that it's a really good way of thinking"*)
- How powerful a project involving diverse artists / people could be, even when based on a relatively simple concept

"it's so easy to become too complacent about something that is motivating the ideas about why we ought to get involved...what we did do was have an artistic integrity in the forefront of our mind".

"it just had such an enormous effect for everyone; taking just the simple art of conversation and giving time and space for people to just re-gather with each other. I think we feel like we can come up with strategies or plans. Sometimes the simplest things can be discovered over a cup of tea"