



Disability Arts Network? Report

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Introduction

Since developing our disability strategy in 2000 and adopting the Social Model of Disability in 2001, the Scottish Arts Council has been aware of the need for greater strategic development of art by, with and about disabled people on a Scotland-wide basis. Substantial work has already taken place in this field, but in comparison to what has gone on in the rest of the UK over the past 25 years or so, Disability Arts in Scotland needs further development.

Clear definitions are important in this area of work – there is a general understanding that by Disability Arts we are referring to any piece of art, across all artforms, that is somehow inspired by the experience of the 'disabled self'. The art must say something about how a disabled person sees the world around them and/or how the world sees that disabled person, either individually or as a group. This, compared to the more general label of Arts and Disability, which refers to any arts activity involving disabled people.

This definition is by no means fixed and demonstrates the need for informed debate and critique of strategic development. To this end, the Scottish Arts Council appointed Phyllis Steel, a highly experienced Scottish arts practitioner, to bring disabled artists together with organisations working with disabled people to look at possible ways forward.

Robert Softley
Equalities Officer (Arts & Disability)
Scottish Arts Council

Starting point

DAN-day Event at Sense Scotland Building, Glasgow Wednesday 1 October 2008

The below invitation was extended to a targeted list of participants (for those who attended, see [Appendix A](#)). The list was created by Robert Softley and Phyllis Steel. The target participants were artists and arts organisations whose main aim is to enable, support and develop creative and artistic programmes for, with and by disabled artists.

The list was intended to result in an adequate representation of the sector and to kick-start the discussion about the possibilities of a network and / or a celebration of the work within the disability/ inclusive arts sector; also to consider the possibility of the Cultural Olympiad being a potential source of income for any future event(s). It was not an exclusive list.

With the creation of an Arts & Disability Officer at the Scottish Arts Council, the time is right to bring together disabled artists and companies working in disability/inclusive arts to look at how we can all work together to move forward.

We are keen to find ways of celebrating the work which is being done by artists with disabilities, arts organisations who work inclusively and so on....it's some of the most exciting artistic developments happening in Scotland just now. A celebration of this work is long-overdue and is an excellent focus for people to come together to showcase their work with, for and by artists with disabilities and the new emergent audiences which are gradually including more and more people with disabilities.

Come and start the celebration on Wed 01 October 2008, 10am to 2pm
Venue: Sense Scotland, 3 Middlesex Street, Kinning Park, Glasgow

This informal get together will look at creating a new network for those developing arts and disability and inclusive arts projects. This will be an opportunity to share aspirations, hopes and fears.

Also at this inaugural meeting we have invited a representative from the Olympiad to present how arts organisations can become involved in the London Olympics. This might offer the sector untold opportunities for the celebration of our work.

DAN-day Event Format

| | |
|------------------|---|
| 9.30am to 10am | Delegates register Coffee / Tea |
| 10am to 10.30am | Robert Softley, Equalities Officer, Arts and Disability, SAC / Phyllis Steel: Introduction |
| 10.30 to 11.30am | Chas de Swiet: Presentation re Cultural Olympiad |
| 11.30 to 11.40am | Comfort break |
| 11.40 to 12.30pm | Two ice-breaker/movement exercise into groups of 6 / 8 Must have, Should have, Could have and Won't have exercise – see Appendix B (Phyllis Steel) |
| 12.30 to 1pm | Lunch and networking opportunities |
| 1pm to 2pm | Robert introduces second part and the Spectrum exercise – see Appendix C Robert concludes the second session: What do people want to happen next? |

Reflections and Outcomes from Phyllis Steel

First, some personal, general reflections on the DAN-day event

- It was not so easy to source individual disabled artists and practitioners.
- Perhaps we had too many items on the agenda – should we have focussed on the discussion about a network for the 3 hours?
- The feedback highlighted that a celebration of the current work of the sector had minimum support or interest. This was perhaps a premature idea and a hasty question to pose at this first meeting.
- Currently, the sector appears fragmented and needs more time to debate and discuss its issues; pursue common interests and evolve a common creative vision.
- The Cultural Olympiad did not have much appeal, interest, or support

The diversity of opinions and discussions on the day, albeit a snapshot of the sector, reflected very clearly that an investment of time and funding is urgently needed to nurture and facilitate '*ways of meeting*' to discuss disability arts and inclusive arts and to offer different ways of how this done.

However, the DAN-day event

- brought together a diverse range of artists and practitioners
- highlighted the gaps to be filled in data collection for any future event
- provided essential information which highlighted the unusual complexity and wide scope of disability/inclusive arts and
- provided a starting-point for the development of an effective network

Issues and possible solutions

(as identified by Robert Softley, Phyllis Steel and the attendees on the day)

'Disability arts' is much broader and more complex than even the totality of mainstream arts. It consists of a mass of different modes of experience and expression in a maze of widely differing - even opposing - experiences, expectations, strategies, and convictions. This makes it potentially one of the richest resources that we have, and at the same time, also the most difficult to work with.

A number of areas have been identified as possible issues;

- The inclusion of artists with learning impairments is going to require focused effort. This is clearly crucial for any network to be able to honestly use the tag 'inclusive'.
- Geographical isolation will clearly have an impact on any role people are able to play in the network – as it does with everything that happens in Scotland.
- The apparent division between disabled artists/those working in disability arts and organisations working with disabled people needs to be explored in an open and honest way.
- The role of the Arts Council needs to be explored. Some agreement was made that a network had to be independent to enable it to apply for funds and also to tell the Arts Council things they might not want to hear.

The following proposals might be, *at this point*, the most effective ways of moving forward and responding to the original idea of a network:

1. An online network would be a low-cost, sustainable, 'hands-off' and democratic method of developing disability arts;
2. The possibility of two online networks, one with an inclusive arts development theme, one with a disability arts theme, would enable practitioners to develop dialogues, debates, sharings, and joint initiatives with a minimum of conflict – however, does this lead to a fragmentation of the sector?

3. To involve potential participants outside the Central Belt and those who have less access to online activities, there could be a series of face-to-face events, utilising the views, plans, and partnerships generated online.
4. A steering group could oversee / operate / manage the above with funding to support the online networks and to co-ordinate face-to-face meetings as and when needed.

Where do we go from here?

1. The clearest consensus that emerged was on the importance of taking swift, positive action to develop opportunities for disabled artists;
2. The second was to utilise online networks to articulate the multiplicity of views and proposals in this area
3. The third is to utilise the participants who volunteered to form some kind of steering group

So now comes the point that people need to step up and say what role they want to have in forming this network. To facilitate this, a number of people that have offered to undertake given tasks can be linked up.

- A delegate not named in this report has offered to set up a Yahoo! Group to facilitate discussion
- Lydia Popowich is keen to set up a web site for disabled artists in the north of Scotland, possibly with a national outlook.
- Jim McSharry, Sally Clay and Nathan Young are interested in establishing the network – perhaps forming the steering group as mentioned above.
- An Inclusive Arts Network is in existence in Glasgow. It is in an early embryonic state. It has no long term vision/aim. Its main purpose is to share information about projects, experience and work methods. The membership is wide – arts practitioners, artists, arts managers, programmers, community arts workers, etc. It is currently co-ordinated by Giant (0141.334.2000) and has a Yahoo! Group.

Accessibility of the day

As an Equalities department within a public authority, the accessibility of everything we do is of paramount importance. We were aware prior to the meeting that it may not have been accessible, for example, to artists with learning impairments. Without making excuses for this, we intend to consider how future meetings could be more inclusive of those with learning impairments or complex communication needs and we would support any suggestions as to how this can be achieved.

Concerns were raised around the physical accessibility of the day, particularly as a number of activities involved moving around. While some of the activities during the day involved extensive periods of standing, we sought to make every activity as accessible as possible – where movement was involved, usually those most able to move did so while those for whom this is difficult stayed where they were. The ice-breaker games led by Phyllis Steel were offered to delegates to participate in if they wished. The two short exercises (duration 10 mins) were used to enable people to get to know each other through some fun games. The ultimate aim was more important - to create four random groups of six people for the MoSCoW exercise. During the Spectrum exercise, seats were available at the full length of the line so standing wasn't necessary.

We can only reiterate our intention that everything we do should be as adaptable as possible to an individual's needs. Consideration must also be given to a strong belief that this intention shouldn't result in 'doing less' – had we taken all of the moving around out of the DANDay meeting, we feel that it would have been a less useful day. We would also express the view, perhaps controversially, that accessibility is a two-way process – certain levels of access must be taken for granted but where the inclusion of individual needs is a concern, then the most productive way to address this is to be open and honest about such needs and to jointly work out solutions. We would actively encourage constructive feedback about the accessibility of events and consultation activities.

Appendix A – List of those present

The list is not exhaustive as attendees came/left at different points during the day and some did not officially register.

Email addresses are listed where the attendee has given permission for their address to be shared.

| Name | Title / Specialism | Organisation (optional) | Email |
|-------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------------|--|
| Robert Softley | Disability Arts Officer | Scottish Arts Council | robert.softley@scottisharts.org.uk |
| Phyllis Steel | Arts Practitioner | Inclusion Matters | phyllis@inclusionmatters.co.uk |
| Lizzie Cass-Maran | SAC Administrator | Scottish Arts Council | lizzie.cass-maran@scottisharts.org.uk |
| Charles Deswiet | | Cultural Olympiad (speaker) | |
| Annette Allison | | | annetteallison2001@hotmail.com |
| Karen Anderson | Artistic Director | Indepen-dance | |
| Sally Clay | Individual | | |
| Chris Dooks | Individual | | chris@dooks.org |
| Michael Fraser | Company Manager | Lung Ha's Theatre Company | info@lunghas.co.uk |
| Elisabeth Gibson | Artistic Director | Project Ability | Elisabeth@project-ability.co.uk |
| Kevin Harrison | Development Director | Arts and Wellbeing, Sense Scotland | |
| Tina McGeever | Artistic Director | Out of the Darkness Theatre Co | |
| Rosita McKenzie | Individual | | |
| Susan McNaught | | Drake Music Project (Scotland) | |
| Jim McSharry | Individual | | |
| Shona Rattray | Company Manager | Birds of Paradise | |
| Karen Shaw | Executive Director | Giant | karen@giantproductions.org |
| Kirsty White | Arts Development Officer | CS Glasgow | |
| Bethany Whiteside | | Drake Music Project (Scotland) | bethanywhiteside@drakemusicscotland.org |
| Karen Wood | Creative Director | Dance House | |
| Sylvia Woodford | | Artlink Central | Sylvia@artlinkcentral.org |
| Nathan Young | Individual | | |
| Unknown | Fund-raising Manager | Sense Scotland | |

Appendix B – MoSCoW Exercise

Notes (*verbatim*) on the idea of some kind of celebration of the current work by disability arts/inclusive arts organisations and individual artists/practitioners

Words highlighted in red were listed three or more times.

The question was asked:

If we did decide to have a celebration of our current work...

| ...WHAT MUST WE HAVE? (to include the absolute essentials) | | | |
|---|--|---|------------------------|
| the right to fail | take risks | access | |
| funding | the right to be ordinary | aspiration | quality |
| ownership | partners | individual agendas | artistic vision |
| inclusion / integration / diversity | energy and drive | time to plan | |
| | things to celebrate and people to celebrate with | | |
| respect | time | momentum | marketed properly |
| | avoid ghettoising disabled or inclusive arts | | |
| | locations must be nationally located across Scotland | | |
| | must not just be central belt focussed | good co-ordination | |
| | physically inclusive to the widest possible audience | | |
| professional artists | | pioneering, pro-active disabled artists | |
| press coverage | | communication between artists & organisations | |
| collaborations | support | networks | good quality work |
| inclusion and access | | people – well paid and volunteers | |
| audience for work | profile | socialising / building relationships | |
| sustainability | | progression, development and follow-up | |
| | organisation and management | participation | |
| | value/respect/impact | long-term commitments | |
| accessible venues | excellence and quality | realistic funding | |
| inclusion | publicity | artists | |

...WHAT **SHOULD** WE HAVE?
(to include short term, interim needs)

big, diverse audiences long term vision **something to celebrate**
 coherence: who you are, what you're doing, your right to be there
 collaborations marketing and publicity NTS support
leadership by disabled artists delivery by disabled artists
 recognise it's molehills not mountains **good quality of networking**
 take the mountain to Mohammed
use of technology for accessibility
 good space / venues organisation high profile venues
 a message high profile personnel sponsorship (including in kind)
 an inclusive audience fund-raising strategy plan B + plan C
 communication research debate

...WHAT **COULD** WE HAVE?
(to include long-term ambitions and goals)

lasting impact – progression recognised standards
 structure – long-term/permanent staff diverse audiences
 outreach and education challenging perceptions
 cult following (for artists and audiences alike)
 realistic timescales – repeat performances dialogue with funders
 trial run concept 'hook' – unique **supportive networks**
 international conversations revisit work clarity not charity
 role models easy to reach venues maintain culture
 more disabled people at all levels
access to mainstream audiences and venues

...WHAT **WON'T** WE HAVE?
 (to include what we definitely do not want)

empty venues censorship charity debt
 funding / sponsor / government led – putting a bias on events
 patronised **tokenism** barriers one-offs negative legacy
 amateur marketing, publicity difficult to access
 redundant activity – won't have outlived purpose rubbish work
 unrealistic expectations compromise bad work/poor quality
 a lack of communication inexperienced commissioners
 crap barriers to new talent application forms
 amateur performers outside intervention
 a celebration (art without celebration)
 disability specific in marketing patronising and insulting art
over-complicated funding streams art for art's sake...

Appendix C – Spectrum exercise

Participants discussed whether they agreed or disagreed with the following statements:

An inclusive arts network would be more beneficial than one purely relating to disability

A disability arts network should be run and managed only by disabled people.

The group was very divided on these points, with the key point of division being the word 'only' in the second statement. There was some concern about ghetto-ising and exclusivity and the general consensus was that there needs to be a balance between maintaining the control and forming solid partnerships.

Funding is required before a disability arts network could be established

Models of similar networks were discussed, which have often been founded without funding and required funding as they grew/progressed.

There were suggestions that an unofficial network already exists, and that this contains 'other forms of riches' – there should be a focus on 'what we do have' rather than 'what we would like'

This question depends on the size of network and its precise purpose – things like a website co-ordinator should be funded.

There can often be too much expectation on disabled practitioners to do things for free and this is frustrating.

Having funding gives a degree of respect and credibility.

The principal objective of this arts network should be to enable the sharing of arts practice.

People mainly disagreed with this, with many in the middle.

It was felt that the sharing of arts practice was important, but objectives should also include:

- Communication and being aware of what is going on
- Sharing opportunities
- Building audiences
- Building partnerships
- Nurturing talent
- Being a stronger force together and 'pulling in the same direction'
- Advocacy and galvanising support
- Not competing with each other unnecessarily e.g. joint funding applications.
- Discussion and debate – though there were concerns expressed that it would become 'just a talking shop'.