

Trust for London commissioned an independent piece of evaluation to explore the experiences of two funded groups - Heart 'n' Soul and Spare Tyre - in trying to secure paid employment in the creative sector for people with learning disabilities.

Key Facts and Findings

- The projects were successful in supporting more than 40 people with learning disabilities (PWLD), of which 7 in 10 (28 individuals) had a work placement in the arts and creative sector and 3 in 10 (15 individuals) secured freelance paid work.
- This is above the current estimate by the Government which suggests that fewer than 1 in 10 adults with learning disabilities are in paid employment.
- The work secured by participants was varied and included theatre companies commissioning an art performance, freelancers recruiting assistants for specific events and organisations recruiting assistant workshop leaders.
- Individuals have secured paid employment of between 2 to 48 hours, with an average of 17 hours and with participants being involved with up to three separate creative pieces.
- The projects engaged with more than 500 sector contacts many which included non-disability organisations and organisations that have traditionally only worked with individuals with a physical impairment.
- Through the work, employers improved their understanding of the needs of learning disabled individuals, including how best to communicate and approach new topics (for example not being afraid to repeat things).
- Employers became more aware of the additional resources required when employing a learning disabled individual (for example the additional rehearsing time and travel support needed).
- The experience also offered PWLD valuable social interaction with non-disabled employees and was seen as contributing to social cohesion.
- Given the differences in skill levels and type of disability, support needs to be tailored as much as possible to individual needs. This is likely to be long-term (up to 2 years or more) and the distance travelled by individuals will vary.
- Maintaining the skills acquired during the projects is important if the results are to be sustainable. In the absence of repetition, it is unclear whether the skills and development will be sustained by the individual.
- Mentoring, advocacy and peer support from “trusted individuals” can be valuable and effective elements of the support offered. Industry ‘experts’ can act as role models but can also tempt participants out of their comfort zones. Advocates and mentors can also provide essential guidance on other matters such as welfare benefits and can provide a trusted link with families and carers.

Background

Trust for London funded **Heart 'n' Soul** and **Spare Tyre Theatre Company** under its aim of helping “*to improve employment opportunities for disadvantaged people*”. The main aim of the funding was to provide training and support to help people with learning disabilities secure paid employment in the creative industries.

In 2008, **Heart 'n' Soul** received a three-year grant totalling £60,000 towards an accredited production-training scheme - *I Did That*. Between 2007-10, **Spare Tyre Theatre Company** received two grants totalling £70,000 for its *Go inc. to Work* employability project which aimed to train and help place people with learning disabilities within theatre and creative media companies.

The Evaluation

The evaluation took place over a two-year period and sought to provide qualitative data through case studies of each company. As part of the work, trainees, key workers and employers were interviewed to highlight the processes involved in the respective training and support programmes. This included an exploration of the similarities and differences between the two programmes in order to further understand the critical factors that contributed to, or undermined, the ability of beneficiary trainees to access paid employment in the creative sector.

Key Points for Consideration

Participants and projects

- Working towards specific personal goals or a qualification offers participants clarity and something to aim for. If employment is not the primary goal of the participant, alternatives will need to be explored in relation to the individual's aspirations.
- A mixed package of support including employability skills is needed alongside the technical training to enable the participant to adapt to the work place - this could include discussing what is (and is not) appropriate behaviour, exploring opportunities to apply for Access to Work funding or how to approach potential employers.
- Opportunities which allow participants to learn first-hand what it is like to work in the industry, should be a key element of an employment programme. These opportunities can also provide a better understanding of the options realistically available to participants and the support needed to achieve their personal goals.
- Good relationships with, and support from, carers is important if the end goal for participants is to be paid work and for them to become more independent. Additional support from carers may be needed to help participants travel independently, give guidance on how to best present themselves and how to behave at work.
- Anxieties by carers or families may need to be addressed at the outset of the support as they may have concerns that the family may be worse off in relation to reduced or a loss of benefits as a result of securing employment.

Employers

- Equality and accessibility legislation are important to the creative industries. Employing people with disabilities contributes towards employers' inclusion policies and in achieving a more diverse and 'richer' workforce.
- As part of the study, a key finding was the need to demystify how employers perceived people with disabilities. Employers who had dealings with people with learning disabilities realised that: "it is no big deal"; for others fear and ignorance could act as significant disincentives in relation to recruitment and employment of people with disabilities.
- It is important to recognise the potential of people with disabilities as employees whilst recognising possible limitations. Some professions in the creative industries may be difficult for individuals with certain disabilities to aspire to. For example, some stakeholders suggested that it was highly unlikely that individuals with learning disabilities could hold down a stage manager role, for example, given the complexities of the role and levels of competition.
- Some employers have developed innovative ways to ensure they are able to pay industry standard ITC/Equity for freelancers that are bound by the 'permitted work rules'. Examples included paying for individuals over a longer time period to keep within the permitted pay cap; or by offering fees for capital payments such as computers or other equipment rather than a salary.
- The cost of the additional support needed by learning disabled individuals in a work placement or paid work context may remain a concern for employers. Public funding is available for additional support but the current mechanisms are complex and may not necessarily fit well with freelance work. With more technical roles, employer investment and support can be significant.
- The right attitude coupled with sufficient technical, creative and professional skills can secure paid work. The twin-track system developed by the projects allowed all participants to develop at the pace suitable for their individual circumstances, while at the same time allowing projects to concentrate limited resources where employment outcomes were most likely.

The External Environment

This study was undertaken in a changing landscape of significant policy reform both in relation to welfare and employment. Whilst the outcome of these cannot, as yet, be certain it is important to recognise that these changes are likely to impact on similar programmes in the future. The key reforms include:

- The Coalition Government's Work Programme laying out plans for "the biggest change to the benefit system since the creation of the welfare state" including the introduction of the Universal Credit system from 2013 replacing most means-tested benefits with an ambition of anyone working being better off.
- Changes in the legislation (the 2010 Equality Act) protecting people with disabilities against "indirect discrimination" where a policy or practice is applied in the same way to everyone, but it puts disabled people at a particular disadvantage and introducing a "positive action provision" for employers (e.g. encouraging or training people to apply for jobs or take part in an activity in which people with that characteristic are under-represented).
- The biggest UK spending cuts for decades in public spending squeezing budgets in the arts and creative sector, with cuts to national and local funding for the arts coming at a time when private sector funding and individual philanthropy is reducing.

Case Studies

Cynthia - Spare Tyre

Cynthia is now a freelance dancer and choreographer. She is employed at professional rates and is more confident in handling her finances and benefits.

I am working differently now. More positive thinking and getting more things done. I remember to bring my diary to write things down and remember dates. I am more committed to working. I might buy a laptop. I'm happy with my progress but I still need to do more

Ellie – Heart 'n' Soul

Ellie trained on the I Did That! Course, and did a work placement at a film production company. She is now working freelance.

I went onto work with my tutor on a freelance assignment, which I was paid for, filming the live feed for the Goldsmiths University Graduation Ceremony. This summer Heart n Soul also asked me to design and film the visuals for their Beautiful Octopus Club which was great as it was a paid commission. Having finished the I Did That! course I am now working regularly for Heart n Soul as a freelancer as part of their production team whilst finishing my studies in Film and Journalism.

Spare Tyre Theatre Company uses theatre to help voiceless communities and individuals to share and celebrate their stories, to transform their lives and to challenge prejudice. More information about the company can be found at <http://www.sparetyre.org>.

Heart n Soul Theatre Company is a creative production company where diverse artists and arts experts work together to make outstanding art to bring about change. It specifically works with artists with learning disabilities to make high quality art to be enjoyed by the widest range of people. More information about the company can be found at <http://www.heartnsoul.co.uk>.

Trust for London is the largest independent funder tackling poverty and inequality in the capital. Established in 1891, the Trust makes grants totalling £7 million a year, supporting 400 voluntary and community organisations in London at any one time. More information about the Trust can be found at www.trustforlondon.org.uk.



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Tackling poverty and inequality



For the full version of the evaluation report by Cambridge Policy Consultants, please contact Trust for London.