

Accessing Culture in the Community

Programme Resource Manual

I N F O R M AT I O N F O R N E W G R O U P S



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Contents:

1. Background
2. Evidence of need
3. Aims and Objectives
4. Recruitment and Induction
5. Research and Networking
6. Promotion
7. Programme Administration
8. Meetings
9. Activity Options
10. Accessibility Options
11. Outcomes
12. Lessons learnt and Evaluation

People who are blind or visually impaired are often excluded from work and leisure opportunities; they may also have other physical disabilities and sensory loss, e.g. hearing loss, learning difficulties, mobility impairments and other conditions affecting access to their communities.

In many areas around the country, in rural areas, towns and cities, people of all ages with sensory loss can be very isolated, with few accessible activities and limited support available.

Cultural events and art exhibitions are by default experienced mainly through sight. Unless an exhibition or event has been specifically designed to be fully accessible to all, people with visual impairments generally choose not to attend, or do not know about it.

Often no alternative tactile and audio formats are available to inform people with visual impairments. This makes access to community events, museums, festivals, markets and galleries very difficult for people with visual impairments. This project explores new ways to address this.

People with visual impairments do not have equality of access to their communities and progressive sight conditions such as Macular Degeneration and Glaucoma not only lead to depression but also isolate people in their homes leading to deterioration in health and wellbeing.

From a Consultation and Research project funded by the Big Lottery Awards4All in 2015 we held meetings with groups of individuals in 5 local organisations across the Teesside region which provide support and limited activities for people with sight loss. We also consulted with the Sensory Support Network of organisations in the Tees Valley region which included Action on Sight loss(now merged with RNIB), Social Clubs for the Blind, Guide Dogs and local council sensory support teams.

Our consultation process evidenced clearly that many people who develop sight loss feel progressively excluded from access to their communities and to museums, galleries and events held in public spaces; all the people we spoke to were enthusiastic about the potential for an accessible activity, designed by the participants, that would find ways to engage with culture and the wider community.

Our consultation also found that people with degenerative sight loss (not uncommon in older people) become depressed and find it difficult to organise, administer and access new activities by themselves which leads to further isolation.

Local support organisations are limited in the activities they offer and do not have the knowledge or skills to run culturally focused sessions.

A centrally coordinated activity programme can ensure an economy of scale in administration across a large physical area, reaching many people. A project of this kind would support the aims of local Joint Strategic Needs Assessments for Sensory Loss.

We applied for funding to deliver a programme of social activities focused on enabling people with visual impairments to re-discover and access culture in and around their communities.

The activities were provided for people who are blind or partially sighted across the Tees Valley region covering 5 Borough areas.

Through regular enjoyable social meetings we enabled and empowered people who are blind and visually impaired to access, appreciate and understand the culture, history and art both locally in their communities and more widely.

This project would take new activity sessions to local areas, bringing people with visual impairments together on a regular basis who have limited opportunities for social engagement.

In addition we encouraged their partners or support workers to attend the sessions with them which provided opportunities for people of a wider range of ages and abilities to come together to develop friendships and networks and support each other.

Giving the participants choices ensured that design of the sessions and their content was of interest and accessible to all.

## 4 Recruitment and Induction

**Recruitment**

Following receipt of the Grant a part-time Project Co-ordinator was recruited locally in the Teesside region.

**Induction Process**

The induction process for the Co-ordinator ran over two months from and initial meetings were used to introduce the project idea and confirm the job role and the supervision process. Further meetings involved a tour of the office space and general administration discussions to ensure that all equipment was provided and access given to network information to enable the Co-ordinator to start to make contact with groups in the region.

Training was given in Book Keeping for the project and filling in the Gantt chart, creating excel spreadsheets, project records and starting files and folders to record project expenditure. The Co-ordinator familiarised themselves with the COESI policies and procedures

We were able to make a good start as contacts had been established with local groups of visually impaired people as part of the preceding Consultation and Research project.

Weekly supervision meetings with the Project Manager were held to review the work done. The format of the meetings ran as follows:

* Progress on previous weeks actions
* Update on weekly activities and findings
* Record keeping
* Agreed actions for the week
* Any other business

Throughout the week, regular communications via telephone and email were also used to report on progress and share interesting research findings.

During the induction, practices and procedures were established for reporting mechanisms, recording of research findings, and location of all files using the Dropbox sharing system.

Initial community research was carried out – looking at how local activity options, events and exhibitions currently cater for people with sensory loss. We considered the preparation and development of the proposed activities including use of accessible formats, with tactile resources and audio descriptions.

We looked at the use of new and traditional technology to aid accessibility, as appropriate to individual and group needs.

### Networking across the region -

Contact was made with individuals and managers in charities and social clubs for older people, libraries and statutory teams in the 5 regional areas covering the Tees Valley area, to ensure we could attract participants to the programme with visual impairments who might otherwise be missed.

We recruited a member of each group as a volunteer project support worker to work with us, informing the research and organisation of the project, advising us on how to promote and support the sessions appropriately.

We encouraged other volunteer supporters to join the activities to mix people of different ages wherever possible. It was essential that we made a difference for each person and that we placed the individual with sensory loss at the heart of the process.

We promoted the project across the Tees Valley through a number of routes including our wide network generated through the consultation process, the COESI member organisations and local Teesside regional organisations supporting people with sensory loss, and our extended networks with the local authorities, libraries and community centres.

We contacted people with visual impairments through the social clubs and charities supporting them. We informed the Sensory Loss Teams in the local authorities so they could refer people to the programme and contacted other organisations providing activities for older people in the region.

We placed the Big Lottery logo on our website Home Page and wrote about the project on our news page (<http://www.coesi.org.uk/Home-Newsletters.aspx>).

We also used social media to let the world know what we were doing and how we were progressing and put out press releases and produced a flyer and poster to send to people electronically.

Administrative support was required for the project including setting up and supporting the discussion groups in each area for planning further sessions and spin-off activities e.g. the potential for supported trips and local museum and gallery visits.

Directors need to provide regular supervision and support of the activity programme coordinator and recruitment of a volunteer support worker with visual impairment.

Our programme covered the planning, organising, administration and facilitation of 72 sessions for 10- 15 people per session over a twelve month period held at 8 different local venues in the Tees Valley region.

We used the following processes and documents to administer the project:

* + Gantt chart
  + Budget sheet
  + Accounts records
  + Pre-planning each session
  + Booking venues
  + Purchasing materials / storage
  + Health and Safety/ Risk assessments
  + Attendance and Feedback sheets
  + Lessons learned

Meetings were required with organisations and group leaders to discuss the content of sessions and potential interest

It was essential to check out the venues /space to be used – to determine they were fully accessible, what might be needed to make them safe/ keep clean etc. and what facilities were available and the means of escape in case of fire.

At the first sessions we discussed what people would like to do first and looked at the range of options available – although this was flexible and we adapted to the needs of the groups.

We always offered refreshments, hot and cold drinks and biscuits.

At some of the sessions the host organisation provided lunches for the participants to extend the social engagement opportunities, and helped with transport.

Our activity options included :-

* Discussion groups
* Art and craft activities tailored to individual needs and levels of visual impairment including:
  + Drawing
  + Painting
  + Glass painting
  + Collage
  + Clay modelling
* Facilitating use of Touch to See books – Living Paintings Resources
* Gallery and museum visits

Alternative formats – providing information in large print Tailoring the activities to meet peoples’ needs

Providing one to one support

Using magnifiers

Special materials and methods of working to assist visually impaired

Care over health and safety – using protective clothing e.g. providing disposable gloves and aprons

Protecting the environment – using waterproof dust sheets on the floor and plastic cloths on the tables

Providing a wide range of materials – enabling people to experiment and try new things

Giving clear instructions and guidance

### “People have better chances in life – with better access to training and development to improve their life skills”:-

At the start of the programme we established a discussion group in each local area so that individuals could be directly involved in the planning and content of the sessions. Working together they informed the design of the project and were also involved in its implementation, learning new skills and gaining confidence.

### “Stronger communities – with more active citizens working together to tackle their problems”:-

We made being involved in the activities a positive experience for individuals and improved their wider networks, beginning the process of reducing isolation, giving people access to new ideas and new people. Those involved in the activity programme were encouraged to assist each other and to share their experiences, helping others to find solutions to everyday problems. We also connected groups in different Borough areas across the region so they ccould develop the potential to share social events and plan joint activities.

### “Healthier and more active people and communities”:-

The development of new culture-focused activities can inspire people with progressive degenerative visual impairments to become more active and involved in their communities, leading to improved health and wellbeing and reduced isolation which can help to reduce inequalities for people of all ages who experience sensory loss and other disabilities.

Making new friends, gaining a sense of achievement and being able to help others along the way can enable people to stay cheerful and active, and will help to avoid depression and anxiety.

12 Lessons learnt and Evaluation

We carried out monitoring and evaluation of the sessions and outcomes, and developed the programme resource manual - which can be used to develop similar programmes in other locations.

A list of participants and feedback was collected at each session. Our Co-ordinator received cards and messages from the participants and

thanks for making the activities fun. All wanted the sessions to continue.

The COESI organisation will be looking at how we might continue this provision.