



What is the language
of Inclusivity?

SENsory Museum of the Future

Space Inclusive, Year 2094

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Ben Rostance x Nottingham Contemporary

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Introduction

Nottingham Contemporary to consider when delivering workshops to people with special educational needs either in the community or in-house. This toolkit was written by Benjamin Rostance with contributions from a group of artists that developed and led four workshops to a group of young adults at Space Inclusive, Nottingham.

The team of artists worked in collaboration with Nottingham Contemporary to create a 'SENsory Museum of the Future' as part of the Nottingham Contemporary's 'Future of Futures' youth programme, funded by the Garfield Weston Foundation and the Foyle Foundation.

The workshops took place over four days in October and November 2021. The aim of these workshops was to support and engage attendees of the workshops that identify as having special educational needs to develop their own exhibition in a space they call 'The Shed'. The shed is located onsite at Space Inclusive's space which will hold some of the artworks created by the attendees of the workshops permanently. This tool kit was devised alongside the workshops and aims to suggest ways that future workshops could be adapted to be more effective and useful for the people we supported in attendance.



Space Inclusive

Nottingham Contemporary

The Artists

The artists involved in the project are:

Wingshan Smith

Wingshan is an artist whose practice straddles fields of education, public programming, and curation. She is interested in the cathartics of rituals as a site for healing in community settings to re-route the viewer back to their own domestic sites where identities are first formulated. She is the Lead Curator at Chaos Magic at BACKLIT Gallery and currently runs the youth programme, 1525 Collective at Nottingham Contemporary. She works to establish ways for young people to work within the organisation as producers of cross-art-form cultural activity.

Charlotte Tupper

Charlotte is a multi-disciplinary artist based in Nottingham. Having begun her practice as a separate entity to her professional ventures, she now enjoys a participatory approach to working; with projects shaped through a social exchange and a collaboration of ideas. Creativity is at the heart of everything Charlotte is involved in. From Heritage Lottery Funded programmes with children in care, to one off craft workshop in care homes, to playing a toilet sailor in family homes, to co-curating contemporary art exhibitions with primary schools, Charlotte is passionate about sharing and promoting the value creativity has in positively bringing people together.

Driven by a need to create and inspired by her capacity for curiosity and imagination, Charlotte relishes in working with a diverse range of audiences using a range of mediums. Her work explores many different themes, but her overarching obsession investigates the role of legacy, as a response to grief, and the choices we make in what we choose to leave behind. Charlotte is an Associate Artist at Nottingham Contemporary, an Artist in Residence with the National

Centre for Craft and Design and an Artist with 'Schools of Tomorrow', a three-year residency with Nottingham city primary schools funded by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation.



Daniella Taiwo

Daniella is an Illustrator and designer who enjoys the childish side of the world and tries to incorporate that in the work she creates as well as the life she lives. She believes that art can help people and share stories. Currently Daniella is an intern at Nottingham Contemporary as she recently finished her education at the University of Nottingham. She is learning about opportunities in the Arts sector and working to combine her love for the practicalities of art with her engineering degree in creating a positive impact for vulnerable groups and societies around her.

Becky Greensides

Becky Greensides is an artist based in Nottingham. Her work spans moving image, sculptural installation, and costumes. She manifests immersive hallucinatory installations sparked by an interest in mental health, ecology, and sci-fi. She studied Fine Art at Nottingham Trent University where she curated exhibitions for Twichel Gallery. She founded the collective Rats Nest in 2020 and is a core member of the artist-led space, Chaos Magic. Her artwork has been exhibited locally in Surface Gallery, Thoresby Street, Twitchel Gallery, and Bunkers Hill. She has also been featured online at @sadgrads2020 and @cvaneastmidlands. Her current practice is focused on building abject hyper-realities that embody magic, healing, and the interconnectedness of the natural world.

Benjamin Rostance

Benjamin is a working-class artist born and based in the East Midlands. He creates artwork that documents snapshots of his experience of childhood trauma, unpredictable mental health, and his experience of growing up in a large, poor working-class family in the U.K. He draws heavily on his 16 years of experience of working in the health and social care sector. This experience informs much of his attitude towards positive ways of supporting and creating accessibility within the health and social care sector and galleries. Currently Benjamin is the mental health coordinator at Backlit gallery and has collaborations with CVAN East Midlands,

and with the Nottingham Contemporary gallery, creating tool kits based around accessibility in the arts and health and social care. Benjamin is also an exhibiting artist in the New Contemporaries 2021 exhibition at First Site, Colchester.



Venue: Space Inclusive

Space Inclusive is an organisation based in the East Midlands, which aims to provide person-centred programmes to improve the lives of young adults who have learning disabilities and learning difficulties. These programmes focus on practical activities which support these young people in the transition from school or college into a more independent and sustainable adult life.



The Toolkit: An Introduction

An aspect of this project was the formation of a toolkit that would highlight areas of interest for the development of future workshops that may increase the accessibility and usefulness of said workshops for attendees in the future.

The group of artists met an hour before each workshop to gather thoughts and opinions about the sessions and any areas of interest they had encountered that could be improved in future workshops. The results of these conversations, as well as conversations with the staff of Space Inclusive and the attendees of the workshops lead to the following toolkit being developed.



What is the language of inclusivity?

An introduction to inclusive thinking and problem solving.

The following list of recommended actions is not an exhaustive list, rather, it should be expanded as your institution develops a more robust and inclusive attitude towards growth in the areas of accessibility. This guide was formed, in part, using the opinions and knowledge of people with lived experience of having special educational needs and development. As time passes, some of these recommended areas for change may become outdated and should be updated or removed from this list. The following ten statements are the result of observations and responses over the four days of workshops.

Section 1

Recommendations as guidance for anyone providing workshops for or on behalf of the Nottingham Contemporary gallery

1. Communication

Before entering the space of people with special educational needs and development, and the people who support them, you should try to establish an understanding of the capacity and communication levels of the people you will be supporting. If you establish how the people you are providing workshops for communicate, you can anticipate using other methods of communication, as well as verbal, to hand out at the introduction stage of your workshops commencing.

2. Environment

Wherever possible, when working with people with special educational needs, especially in any instance where the person(s) providing the workshop have little or no experience and training in health and social care, you should aim to visit the space that you will be working prior to the first day. It is important to see the space you will be using, knowing the environment will reduce anxiety for yourself and for the people you will be supporting. Having a solid structure and plan, and knowledge of how that will happen in the space, will help to reduce overall anxiety in yourself and the people you support.

3. Managing expectations

It is important that you take time to get to know the people that you are supporting. The best way to do this is to plan-ahead by speaking with the manager and staff who work alongside the attendees of your workshop. Try to have a solid plan, in an easy-to-read format, that lets the people you will be supporting know what they can expect from taking part in the workshops. Include a time schedule if possible.

4. Alternative activities

Naturally you will want to make your sessions as engaging as possible, however, having additional activities planned, for any attendees who are unable to engage with a sustained single activity, is important and can reduce anxiety.

5. Positive reinforcement.

It is very important to make sure that whatever the outcome and however much the people you have supported have engaged with the planned activities, they have a positive experience with the workshops. It is also important that you take the time to get to know the people you are supporting, always addressing them personally with their chosen pronoun or name when talking with them.



Section 2

Recommendations as guidance for partners or anyone experiencing an art workshop, delivered by the Nottingham Contemporary gallery

6. Sharing knowledge and skills

While there are no expectations of the people taking part in the workshop, it is useful if the participants can take away new skills and knowledge. To do this, you may want to provide notes or guidance on how to repeat aspects of the workshops you deliver so the people you are supporting can repeat the creative process outside of the workshop. Any format that you disseminate this information on should be easy to understand.

7. Methodology and new ways of interpretation

Be ready to work and adapt the workshops to new ways of thinking and doing. Always try to accommodate the new and interesting ways that the people you are supporting will blur the boundaries of instructions. The outcome of each workshop can be used to inform the next one to be adaptive and intuitive to the needs and wants of the people taking part in them.

8. Embrace failure as part of the outcome of the workshops

The importance of allowing participants time to explore their artistic flair is paramount when delivering a workshop. Providing as much time and as little expectation for outcome as possible will leave room for speculation and a more enjoyable encounter with making and creating.

9. Valuing different interpretations of what art can be

When supporting people with special educational needs you may encounter opinions of what art is that you find challenging or simplistic. It is fundamentally important to rethink your understanding of what art can be, from the perspective of the people we are supporting, to bring value and confidence in the art produced in the workshops.

10. Establishing further opportunities or networking

It is important to begin thinking about how the workshops you provide can have forms of accessibility that enable long term relationships between the people you are supporting and the gallery. It is important to build relationships with individuals, groups and outside institutions in order to give the participants repeated opportunities to be involved in the gallery and its public programs. The more you involve groups, the more familiar they will become with your program, and this in turn leaves space for relationships to mature.



Conclusion

This toolkit took shape, intuitively and felt naturally forthcoming alongside the workshops, as they were delivered. The people participating in the workshops at Space Inclusive genuinely appeared to get a lot out of their interactions with the artists from the Nottingham Contemporary gallery group. The legacy of this project should be that of speculation and lateral thinking. This set of recommendations can be used as a springboard for staff with little or no experience of working in the health and social care sector to begin launching into new ways of adapting and thinking when it comes to working with people with special educational needs. It's a fantastic start, and with more development and guidance from the people that this tool kit aims to support, it will continue to grow and develop into policy that can have positive effects on the gallery space and the people who are yet to enjoy making the most of that space.

Written by Benjamin Rostance November 2021.

