

# Ensuring your venues and events are open to all

## A brief Access Guide

UNLIMITED...  
*impact*



SCOTTISH  
MENTAL  
HEALTH  
ARTS & FILM  
FESTIVAL



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Aerial dance workshops led by All Or Nothing Aerial Dance Theatre with members of Scottish Ballet’s Regenerate class, Luminare 2014. Photo by Eoin Carey.

# 1. Introduction

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Unlimited Impact began work with Luminate, the Scottish Mental Health Arts and Film Festival and the Mental Health Foundation (SMHAFF) in 2014. We were asked to create a disability access resource that would be useful and relevant to the many partners and varied arts events they work across. This was no mean feat! The scope of activity that happens under the umbrella of these two organisations is huge – covering arts activity in all shapes, at venues and community groups of all sizes.

So this guide is a compilation of ‘top tips’ and general guidance for working with and welcoming disabled artists and audiences of all ages. We hope it offers long and short term options for people working to any budget. It is not going to give you all the answers (we don’t have them) but we hope it will help you identify the right questions to ask.

This guide was created by Unlimited Impact and Shape in collaboration with Luminate, Scotland’s creative ageing festival, SMHAFF and with support from the Spirit of 2012 Trust.

Nick Goss  
Shape Access Consultant  
Goss Consultancy Ltd



Nick Goss.

## Foreword

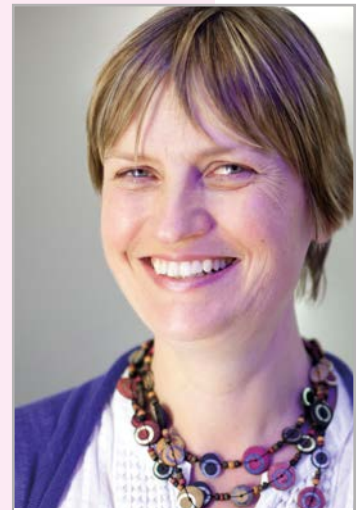
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I am delighted that Luminare has worked with the Scottish Mental Health Arts and Film Festival, and with Unlimited Impact, to develop this information leaflet on access to venues hosting arts events.

Luminare is Scotland's creative ageing festival. Our programme explores creative ageing in its many guises, and you will find activities taking place across Scotland every day in October that celebrate creativity, share stories, and explore what ageing means to all of us. Creativity has no age, and Luminare includes many activities by and for older people as well as activities that will appeal to people across the generations. Alongside our public events we also feature an array of activities in care homes and day centres.

It's vital to Luminare that venues in our festival are accessible to disabled people, and to older people who may need particular consideration too. This new resource gives straightforward advice and tips to anyone running an arts activity – whether in a village hall, community centre or arts venue – and if you are involved in organising events I hope you find it useful.

Anne Gallacher, Director  
Luminare, Scotland's creative ageing festival



Anne Gallacher.  
Photo by Drew Farrell.

Led by the Mental Health Foundation, the Scottish Mental Health Arts and Film Festival (SMHAFF) is one of Scotland's most striking and provocative cultural events, encompassing music, film, visual art, theatre, dance, and literature. The annual festival takes place in venues across Scotland during October, aiming to support the arts and challenge preconceived ideas about mental health. By engaging artists, connecting with communities and forming collaborations, we celebrate art and mental health, exploring the relationship between creativity and the mind, and promoting positive mental health and well-being.

It is a key consideration for SMHAFF that all venues are fully accessible to disabled people. As such, we were delighted with the opportunity to collaborate with Luminare once again and develop this resource with Unlimited Impact. The leaflet will provide valuable information to venues, organisations and individuals across Scotland who are planning an event and want to ensure that it is accessible.

Gail Aldam, Festival Manager  
The Scottish Mental Health Arts and Film Festival, Mental Health Foundation



Gail Aldam.  
Photo by Davy Maclver.

## 2. Achieving Access for All – Why bother?

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Why bother – well, firstly, it's the law. Since the Equality Act in 2010 it is unlawful for service providers to treat disabled people less favourably because they are disabled. Anyone providing a service to the public must make 'reasonable adjustments' to make sure disabled people can access those services.

It affects us all. Advances in medical science mean we are living longer, and the number of people with age-related disabilities is rapidly increasing.

### The facts:

1. Just over one million (20%) of people living in Scotland have a long-term activity-limiting health problem or disability.

(The Scottish Government)

2. Nearly one in five people of working age (1 million, or 19%) in Scotland are disabled.

(The Scottish Government)

3. Disabled adults, or those with a disability (62%), illness or health problem (63%), or both (45%), are much less likely to attend a cultural event than those without (83%).

(Scottish Household Survey Annual Report 2012).

Finally and on a more human level; access to arts is a basic human right. There is a growing body of research which suggests that engagement in arts activity has a huge benefit to the well-being of older and isolated individuals.

So whether you are a high profile arts venue or small community group you will want to ensure that your arts event is open and accessible to the widest number of people.

## 3. Getting the basics right

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It is important to remember that you do not have to be an ‘expert’, or have specialist knowledge of a particular medical condition or impairment to make your event or venue more welcoming to disabled people. By understanding the basics you will be able to create an access plan that will work for you and your potential artists and audiences.

### Understanding the Social Model of Disability

The Social Model of Disability was developed by disabled people to identify, and take action against, discrimination.

It’s a different way of looking at disability. Rather than the disabled person being ‘the problem’ and focusing on what someone can’t do because of their impairment (known as the ‘Medical Model’) the social model says that barriers are created by our society. These barriers may be **physical**, **organisational** or **attitudinal**.

So it’s not illness or impairment that are the real problems, it’s discrimination and the barriers in society.

But how do we put this into practice? You could try:

- Asking about a person’s access requirements rather than details of their medical condition – ‘what do you need?’ rather than ‘what’s wrong with you?’ This is very important for hidden impairments or fluctuating health problems where access needs may not be obvious.
- Concentrating on improving the access you can provide, not on focusing on individuals and their impairments.

### Planning in Access

So where do you start? A key tip is to get planning.

#### Plan early

Start thinking about ways in which you might make your event more accessible to disabled and older audiences at the very beginning of your project. Be clear about what you can and can’t provide, and where you can be flexible based on individual requests.

#### Don’t make assumptions – ask!

Disabled people are the experts in their own requirements and access needs. It is important to give people the chance to talk about their access requirements at the beginning of your communication with them. This shows that you are ready and willing to talk about access and can be reassuring.

## Plan your budgets

Make sure you know how much money you have to allocate to access adaptations. Think creatively around how to provide access – there is often a low cost solution! For example:

## Relaxed performances

This is a performance that has a more relaxed attitude to noise and movement and may include some changes to the light and sound effects. There are a number of people who may benefit from this and it's completely free to run. Make sure you advertise the 'relaxed nature' of the show to your audiences and make an announcement before the event so everyone knows what's happening and why.

## Quiet spaces

Some people may not like busy spaces and loud noises. Can you offer a quiet space for people to go and relax?

## Synopsis of plays or audio material

It can be pricey to provide captions and subtitles (but probably not as expensive as you think). A good cheap alternative is to provide a written transcript for deaf and partially hearing people. Make sure you provide these in large print as well.

## Audio Description

This is an audio narration of visual material in an exhibition or performance to make it accessible to blind and partially sighted people. If you don't have the budget to professionally transcribe and record Audio Description maybe you can record one yourself and make an MP3 file available on-line? Or you could ask local participants and community members to record their visual response to the work?

## Tactile Tours

This is a tour of an exhibition or the set / props or costumes for a performance (usually before a show). These don't usually cost anything to run – but you do have to know what can and can't be touched!

## Catering

Disabled people may need information about venue catering, and staff may need awareness training. If you provide food, be prepared to list allergens, and if you have first aiders or regularly provide food you could consider anaphylaxis awareness training.

## Plan for the unexpected

Be prepared for the unknown. Even when you ask people to provide their access requirements, you should be prepared to respond to access requests that only become known on the day. Never make assumptions. You may wish to designate a member of event staff as the point of contact for disabled people, and ensure they have disability awareness training.

## Plan together

It is essential that disabled and older people are included and consulted in the event planning process.

Why not invite everyone to contribute to the discussion? A wide range of people, including disabled and older people, should be central to planning an accessible arts event. Remember many impairments are not visible and often people covered by the legal definition, do not consider themselves disabled. The more people you ask to input the richer your access vision will be.

There are many ways you could invite people to input:

- Create a regular focus group to discuss what people would really like you to provide.
- Gather feedback after your event.
- Provide an email and a phone contact for people to discuss access requirements in advance.



Moving Minds event. SMHAFF Festival.  
Photo by Russell Sneddon.



## Language

Language is important; it helps us avoid misunderstanding and offence but the most important thing to remember is...don't panic!

Make sure the language you use is always:

1. **Descriptive** (e.g. Wheelchair user; Blind person).
2. **Understandable** (e.g. has a hearing or speech impairment).
3. **Simple** (no unnecessary adverbs like 'severely' or 'profoundly'. They might mean very different things to different people anyway).
4. **Not emotive** (no 'suffering from...' or 'victim of...').
5. **Respectful** – be guided by disabled people and incorporate a social model perspective.

Take the lead from disabled people and be open and adaptable to change the language you use, based on their suggestions. Here are some of our suggestions to get you started:



Please try 	Please avoid 
Disabled people/person/older person	People with a disability/disabilities 'The' Disabled The elderly Handicapped Suffering from a disability Physically challenged Someone who cannot...hear, speak, walk etc
Non-disabled person/people	Able bodied person Normal
Wheelchair user	Wheelchair bound
Blind person/people Visually impaired person/people	The Blind Person without sight

table continues overleaf...

Please try



Please avoid



Learning disability Learning disabled person/people	Retarded/retard Special needs Spastic/Autistic/Aspergers/Downs/Mongol
Person of small stature	Midget Dwarf
Mental health service user Mental health system survivor (or just “survivor”) Mental Health or Wellbeing (when referring to everyone) People with lived experience of mental health problems	People with mental health (that’s all of us) Mental Mad (though sometimes reclaimed by lived experience groups) Mentally ill Diagnostic labels like anorexic, schizophrenic or manic depressive, especially as adjectives (a bit OCD)
Recovery	Cure
Personal assistant/PA Support worker Access assistant	Carer (unless a disabled person uses the term themselves)
Accessible toilet Adapted toilet	Disabled toilet
Accessible parking Blue badge parking	Disabled parking
Has Experiences	Suffers from
Access requirements	Access needs (although it is used and acceptable sometimes)

## 4. Disability Confidence

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If you understand the social model, have the appropriate language and a clear vision of the access you can provide – then you can be disability confident when dealing with the public.

The following general guidelines can help:

1. **Listen** – Listen to what disabled and/or older people are asking for or telling you. Make time and space for this.
2. **Ask** – Be confident in asking disabled and/or older people for advice, information or the best way to work together. Never assume.
3. **Act** – Acknowledge that you have heard and understood – then respond accordingly.
4. **Learn** – Learn from what went well and what didn't – build access into every stage of the review and evaluation process.

Disability confidence is about both providing everybody with the same level of good service and knowing what you can do differently for disabled and / or older people to ensure equal access.

### Spotlight on being Dementia Friendly

People experience dementia in many different ways, and, as highlighted throughout this guide it is important to listen to people's access requests and respond to individual requirements. People with dementia can find areas such as communication and negotiating unfamiliar surroundings more difficult.

The following guidelines are aimed at increasing confidence and helping to ensure that groups and events are accessible and inclusive of people with dementia, their family and friends.

#### Communication:

1. Be calm and patient and allow plenty of time for the person to take in what you say and to reply.
2. Put the person at ease – be friendly, smile and make eye contact.
3. Make sure that your tone, body language and facial expressions match what you are saying.
4. Try not to confuse or embarrass the person by correcting them bluntly.
5. Don't stand too close or stand over someone to communicate.
6. Speak clearly and calmly and do not cover your mouth. The person should be able to see your face clearly.

7. Use short, simple sentences. Ask straightforward questions that can be answered simply e.g. yes or no.
8. Talk **to the person** with Dementia

#### Environment:

1. If you are holding regular events, can these be held in the same space within your venue to help people familiarise themselves with their surroundings?
2. Clear signposting can make a big difference. Are signs, for things like the toilets, clear to see and easy to understand?
3. Contrasting colours can help, e.g. signs, light switches and doors being a different colour from the surrounding walls making them easier to see.
4. If possible avoid busy patterned or shiny flooring as some people with dementia can find it difficult to recognise and negotiate these surfaces.
5. Mirrors can be disconcerting for some people with dementia. You may want to cover these up and/or remove these.
6. Consider the furniture in your space. E.g. introducing chairs with arm rests might be more suitable for older people and people with dementia.



Vital Xposure, Let Me Stay.  
Photo by Libby Watson.

## 5. Accessible marketing and communications

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### Accessible print

1. Try to write information in plain English. It is clearer for everyone. Keep your sentences short and do not use complicated words.
2. You don't have to compromise your creative or descriptive writing. The challenge is to make what you write interesting and accessible. It can be done!
3. In some circumstances, you may choose to produce an Easy-Read version of more complex material. Make it visually interesting and do not patronise the reader. Don't cram the page – keep it clear and simple.
4. Use text at 14 point (12 point is the absolute minimum). Many Blind and partially sighted people will require a point size of 18+. If in doubt ask.
5. Avoid italics, serif or 'handwritten' fonts or capitals for long, continuous text.
6. Use high contrast between colours and text (at least 25%).
7. Avoid putting text over images, unless you use a gradient or a semi-transparent layer between the text and the image to 'smooth' the image.
8. Close-set type can be daunting. Leave space between paragraphs and keep your paragraphs short.
9. Avoid glossy papers (they reflect too much light), low paper weights (because text can show through), and paper folds that hide text.
10. PDFs are often incompatible with screenreader software and therefore may be inaccessible to Blind and partially sighted people. It's best to have a plain Word version of any documents too.

### A choice of formats

1. Invite people to ask for different formats – don't make it sound like a chore. For example, say "please ask us for this information in alternative formats" rather than "this information is available in alternative formats upon request".
2. Know which alternative formats you can supply, and how long it will take you to produce them. Find some suppliers such as printing companies that can produce your brochures or flyers in Braille and media companies that can convert text into audio or video files. If that's too expensive, think about what you can produce yourself.
3. Find out the costs of translation in advance so you can plan this into your budgeting. You could keep some funds back to pay for these alternative formats.

## Online

1. Use images of your work. For each image provide a line of text that describes the image; this helps screenreader software and makes your material more accessible to Blind and partially sighted people.
2. Include subtitles for online video materials – or include a transcript.
3. Use meaningful links. Imagine the link appears on its own at the top of the page – will people know what will happen if they ‘click here’? Make the whole sentence the link by saying ‘click here for more info about accessible marketing’ or ‘click here for more details of our next exhibition’. Check your existing links work in this way.
4. WC3’s Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI) is an accessibility standard for websites, allowing you to achieve an A, AA or AAA rating. For more information, visit their website [www.w3.org/WAI](http://www.w3.org/WAI)



The Falkirk Cabaret led by Love Music, Luminare 2014.  
Photo by Drew Farrell.

## 6. Brief Access Checklist

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The following access checklist is not intended as an exhaustive list. Some areas may not be relevant for your group or venue but should be used as a starting point to think more broadly about access:

Publicity/Marketing	Reviewed?	Action
Have you included information about what access you are providing in: your print, on your website, at your venue (on site) and in any materials sent to other places (i.e. in press releases)		
Have you made information available in any alternative formats, for example: Large print, Audio, Braille, Plain English, Easy Read (which may include pictures and icons to illustrate meaning), a Word version for e-mailing/downloading, maps with symbols/textured maps		
Have you informed people how they can order information in alternative formats? Is this mentioned in all your marketing materials?		

Journey/Travel	Reviewed?	Action
Do you have accessible, clearly sign posted parking bays? Are these suitable for minibuses? Are these clearly indicated in your marketing and known to all your staff and volunteers?		
Have you publicised the nearest public transport links (including information on access at stations, bus services and road works causing disruptions)? Have you included information on the nearest accessible taxi service?		
Have you indicated the distances/gradients between key points? For example toilets, parking, venue or surrounding facilities? Where are your drop-off/pick-up points? Are they clearly visible to visitors? Have you indicated any landmarks to guide people to your location?		

Signage and Orientation at your Venue	Reviewed ?	Action
Do you have someone as first point of contact for access at your venue or the location of your event? Will they be easy to spot?		
Have you placed all signage at a suitable height for wheelchair users?		
Are there any reflective surfaces that may make visibility difficult?		
Have you made sure all event signage has good colour contrast and that it uses clear font types and suitable point size?		
Is signage written in plain language and/or illustrated?		
<p>Have you considered accessible display/exhibition layouts? For example:</p> <p>Suitable hanging height of works, labels/interpretation panels, plinths, display cases (eye level at 1.10m for wheelchair access)</p> <p>Turning space for wheelchairs and buggies (i.e. minimum of 1.30m across)</p> <p>Adequate lighting</p> <p>Interpretation in a range of formats e.g. Audio description, Braille, Large Print, Plain English etc.</p>		
Have you installed signs to highlight all entrances/exits? Have you ensured footpaths and access routes are level and removed any obstructions?		
Have you indicated any stairs, ramps etc. using high contrast markings?		



Accessibility Across all Areas	Reviewed ?	Action
<p>Have you considered the timing of the event?</p> <p>Would a matinee performance be more suitable than an evening event?</p>		
<p>Have you included any additional assistance/extra services such as:</p> <p>Facilities for guide dogs (water bowl)</p> <p>Use/hire of wheelchair/buggy/scooter</p> <p>Induction loop</p> <p>Visual announcements for intervals/alarm system?</p>		
<p>Are your work spaces accessible (e.g. studios/offices/rehearsal or dressing rooms)?</p>		
<p>Have you considered the height of tables/counters to accommodate wheelchair users in all the public areas on site e.g. café, reception area, lobby, box office etc.?</p>		
<p>Have you considered seating options for wheelchair users in performance spaces, ensuring they are not segregated from non-wheelchair user friends/family?</p> <p>Can you provide soft seating and/or seating with armrests (to assist people getting out of chairs)</p>		
<p>Would some audiences benefit from extra heating at your venue? Or extra lighting?</p>		
<p>Have you informed all your team of the seating options available (for example the gradient and type of seating, leg room, floor surfaces)?</p> <p>They can only help people who ask if they know what's available.</p>		
<p>Do you have reserved seats for deaf audience members near the front (so they can lipread, clearly see the interpreter or captions (if applicable))?</p> <p>Have you informed your team where any support options will be placed?</p>		
<p>Are your accessible toilets well maintained (e.g. that the emergency pull cord is within reach from the floor and NOT tied up out of reach)?</p> <p>If toilets are kept locked is signage clear on how to access them, do all of staff know where the key is kept and are they aware of any obstructions stored inside?</p>		

## A final word

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Improving the health and wellbeing of individuals and communities is a cause that I have advocated throughout my professional life, and one which is also very close to my heart, so I am delighted to see Luminare's creative ageing festival move from strength to strength.

What is striking about the festival is the lengths to which it goes to engage new, diverse audiences and performers. From care homes to island communities, their reach knows no bounds, and their strategic approach to partnerships suggests that breadth will continue to grow and develop.

Through Spirit of 2012's partnership with Unlimited to deliver the Unlimited Impact programme we have supported the tour of "Let Me Stay" by Julie MacNamara – a tender and moving exploration of the impact that Alzheimer's can have on family relations – and brought it to a wide range of audiences. Dementia is a difficult but increasingly prevalent reality which is touching the lives of many of us, and is therefore an important subject for artistic exploration.

Spirit of 2012 was founded by the Big Lottery Fund to ensure that the magic of the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games – of people joining together in celebration as a nation and as a community – continues to be felt across the UK. Luminare is a wonderful example of this; its work to challenge and improve attitudes to and understanding of ageing is inspirational, and I am glad that Spirit is able to help further its reach and impact.'

Sir Harry Burns

Spirit of 2012, Trustee and Professor of Global Public Health at the University of Strathclyde



Sir Harry Burns.

**Unlimited Impact** is supported by the Spirit of 2012 Trust and is a new extension of Unlimited; the £2 million, three-year programme delivered by the disability-led arts charity, Shape, and arts producing organisation, Artsadmin, and funded by the National Lottery through Arts Council England and Creative Scotland. Unlimited Impact focuses on developing and inspiring the next generation of young disabled people passionate about making change through the arts; extending Unlimited's reach by supporting venues across the country to successfully programme ambitious and high quality work by disabled artists; and deepening discussion and debate around work by disabled artists.

## Contact

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**Shape** provides opportunities and support for disabled artists and cultural organisations to build a more inclusive and representative cultural sector. Shape is supported by Arts Council England.  
020 7424 7330 (mainline Voice)  
[www.shapearts.org.uk](http://www.shapearts.org.uk)



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