

# The Case for More Inclusive Festivals: Still Not There, Yet!

Report by Deirdre Henderson and Alex Callaghan (November 2017)



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## Executive Summary:

Accessibility in entertainment venues, events, and festivals has clearly come a long way in the past twenty years. However, it appears that the industry in Scotland is still not meeting the needs of a wide range of people from within Scotland's communities.

The Scottish Government has identified that one in four people in Scotland are disabled. It has set up a Delivery Plan – 'A Fairer Scotland for Disabled People (2016)' (Appendix 1) to ensure that barriers are removed that currently stop disabled people from taking part in everyday life. One of the five key elements of this plan are 'Places that are accessible to everyone', with a subsection on 'Culture and Leisure'. Therefore, this report, as an informed snapshot, is timely to direct cultural and leisure organisations, and their funders to meet needs that are not being addressed for people with impairments.

This report has shown that with venues not meeting the needs of disabled people events and festivals are not only reducing their audience capacity by a quarter, but also by a duplicate number of people without impairments who want to attend events and festivals with their friends and family, as some people opt to not participate in cultural events due to the barriers that they experience.

*'Don't go because there is always an issue'*

(Respondent with an impairment)

## **This report recommends:**

- Further, more in depth research is carried out into the needs of disabled event / festival attendees and artists, and those that support them, in taking part in cultural events and festivals.
- Scottish Government funded public bodies and funding bodies re-design funding applications and evaluate projects using a higher level of criteria that meet the needs of disabled people.
- Disabled people and their social groups need to be at the core of a Human Rights, co-designed process in creating new standards for inclusive events and festivals.
- This snapshot report is used to stimulate progressive discussions with the cultural sector in Scotland.

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## **Background:**

Bella Freak was a group formed in 2016 from disability activists who had an interest in the arts / culture, whether as artists or as audience members. The group wanted to develop an inclusive multi-platform festival in Edinburgh to appeal to the widest possible audience, showcasing proven and emerging disabled performers, valuing quality and experienced artists.

Bella Freak was supported by Alba Community Development to facilitate the planning of the festival and the delivery of this research. Funding was secured from Awards for All to assess the feasibility of running an inclusive festival.

At this stage, there was a provisional plan for an inclusive festival in St Andrews Square in Edinburgh, immediately before the Edinburgh 2017 Fringe Festival. Working with The Stand comedy club, Bella Freak had discussed identifying physical changes that could be made to the regular Edinburgh Fringe site at St Andrew's Square, run by The Stand, that would remain in place for the duration of the Edinburgh Fringe, following on from the inclusive festival.

As the project progressed and the group had started working on a funding application for the festival event, the group learned that the owners of St Andrew's Square in Edinburgh, represented by Essential Edinburgh, had decided to cease permission for activities and festivals in the square in favour of creating 'a place for quiet enjoyment all year round'.

## Methodology:

The initial feasibility started in Edinburgh in August 2016 where a video (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vFzYJ3VajR8>) was made to summarise what the Bella Freak inclusive festival would look like, and why it was needed. In October 2016 arts organisations, individual artists, tourism organisations, event management practitioners, disabled peoples' organisations and Councillors were invited to come together to share good practice in inclusive event / festivals, identify gaps in provision, and consider potential solutions.



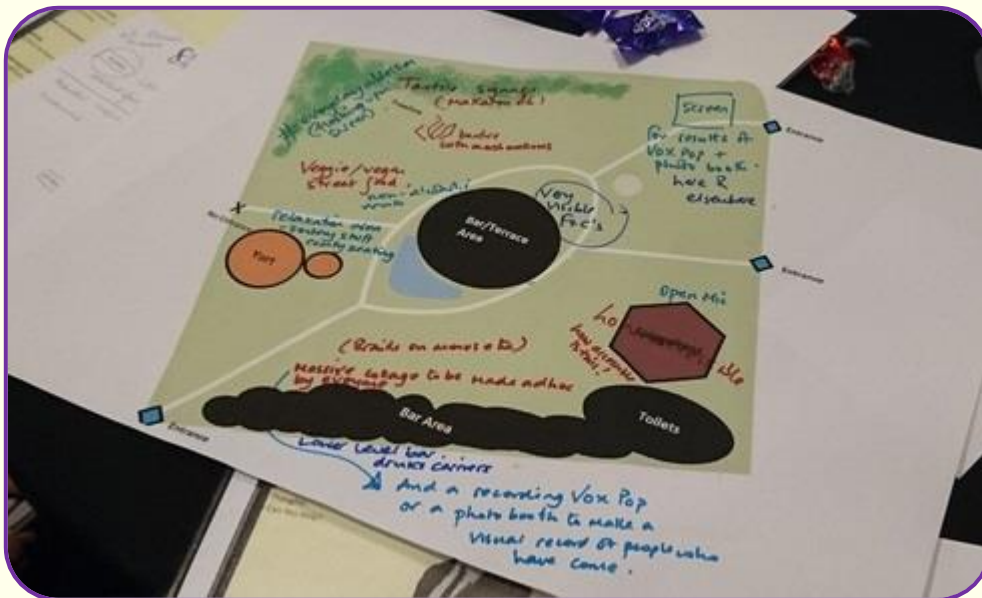
(Picture 1: Multi agency discussion of good practice for festivals)

After short presentations from Bella Freak and Alba Community Development, participants were given simplified site plans of St Andrew's Square. The participants were asked to work in small groups to discuss issues and make notes on the plans, feeding back ideas of how to make a more inclusive festival.



(Picture 2: Review of the event layout at St Andrews Square)

A few weeks later, Bella Freak took the information and opinions gathered from this meeting to hone down a list of changes (Appendix 2) to meet the needs of a range of people with impairments.



(Picture 2: Recommendations for event layout at St Andrews Square)

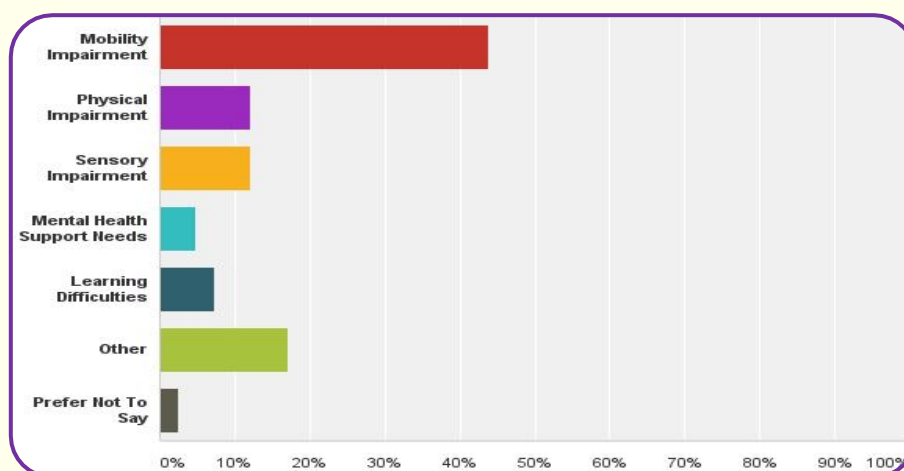
The identified needs included better presented information, more accessible on site facilities with designated areas, and dedicated on site staff to meet the needs of people with impairments.

In addition to the distillation of the information from the meeting with stakeholders, a snapshot of views was sourced from a Survey Monkey survey run in May 2017, giving people with an impairment and people without an impairment the opportunity to share their views on what barriers they faced at events / festivals and what solutions would meet their needs. The survey ran for two weeks and received 56 responses.

This is an area of the research that could be developed further to gain an increased understand of what barriers both disabled people and people without impairments face trying to attend events / festivals.

## Findings:

Of the 56 responses to the online survey, 37 were from people who identified themselves as having a disability, and 19 who did not. 55% of respondents considered themselves to have mobility or physical impairments, and 12% had a sensory impairment. Some respondents identified that they had multiple disabilities which may account for the selection of 'Other' in the survey.

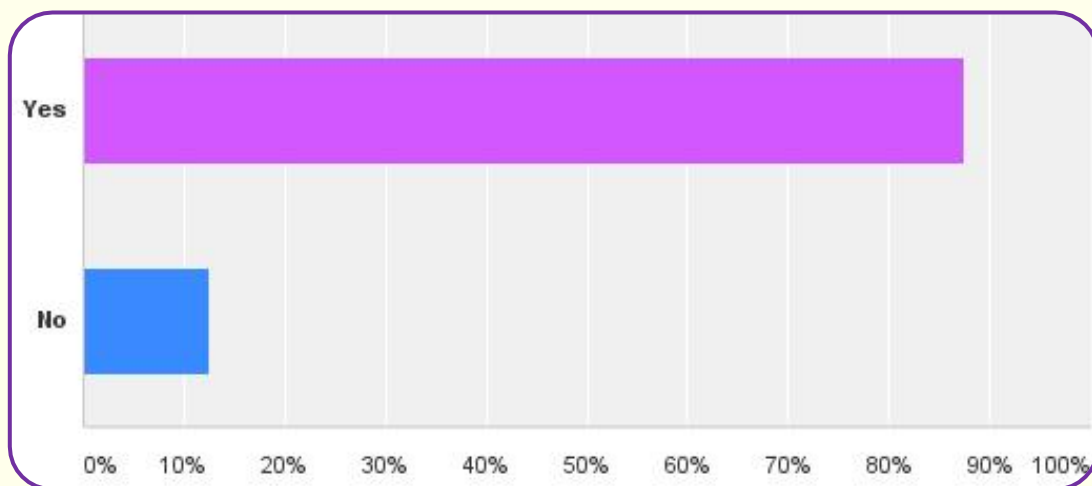


(Chart 1: Respondents Type of Impairment Type)



Respondents mainly came from the Lothians, with some from Argyll and Bute, Dumfries and Galloway, Glasgow, Lanarkshire, and Fife. Most respondents were disproportionately women, although demographically the respondents represented a wide range of age, sexuality, ethnic and gender types.

In analysing the data, a filter was used to compare the responses of people who had a disability and those that did not. There was little difference between the two groups, with well over 80% of each group experiencing difficulties accessing public art events like screenings and performances as a disabled person or a person accompanying a disabled person.



(Chart 2: Respondents with and without impairments who have faced barriers when accessing public art events)

The responses show that basic accessibility issues that are well known about, are still an issue:

- Lack of captions, subtitles, induction loops, BSL interpreters, clear signage, understanding for people with hearing impairments.

- Wheelchair and limited mobility access is often not available at temporary venues such as during the Edinburgh Fringe or Bruce Festival in Dunfermline, or the Dumfries and Galloway Festival.
- Wheelchair access can be down dark lanes, far from the main entrance.
- Bannisters are needed on both sides of a walkway for people with mobility issues.
- Box Offices are not always accessible.
- No plan for the evacuation of people with disabilities in an emergency.

*'Long distances to travel from drop off points to entrances / venues.'*

(Respondent with an impairment stating a key barrier that they face)

There are additional physical access issues that venues often do not think about:

- Not being able to get to the bar at intermission time for people who use a wheelchair or have mobility impairments.
- Not having accessible toilets at the same level as the event seating, or well signposted.
- Designated areas for wheelchair users do not have additional seating for additional wheelchair users and carers / friends, or can accommodate moulded seat system wheelchairs.
- There are no discounts for carers at most venues accompanying a person with an impairment.
- Designated areas for wheelchair users don't always have good sightlines.
- Poor parking options, often far from the venue.

- Uneven flooring, rough ground, and muddy fields make walking difficult for people with mobility impairments.
- No facilities for changing adults with disabilities. E.g. Changing Place units.

*'Only one person allowed with wheelchair user in disabled area so other child couldn't join their sibling.'*

Hidden disabilities are not being addressed.

- Many people with learning disabilities need quiet spaces.
- People with autism need an option to be seated first to avoid the crowded environment.

*'...nearly all festival theatre productions...only recognise a disabled concessional rate unless you are bound to a wheelchair...unseen disabilities including mental health and anxiety issues can also make it difficult accessing the arts.'*

In addition, there were a few comments about venue staff lacking an understanding of issues faced by people with impairments.

*'My son has autism...we were refused admission one time...door staff suspected he was drunk, and when I explained he had learning disabilities, I was told the event wouldn't be suitable. A queue had formed and my son was beginning to get upset so we left as people were starting to stare.'*

As well as looking at barriers, respondents were asked about reasonable adjustments that could be made to increase inclusiveness, through accessibility.

- Low level bars and Box Office.
- Adult sized changing facilities.
- Personal Assistants.
- Fetchers and Carriers to guide people with disabilities and to be on call to get drinks, food and tickets.
- Physically accessible venues chosen or created at the planning stage, on an accessible route.
- Disabled parking areas at the entrances of venues.
- More BSL interpreters.
- More audio description offered.
- Hearing Loops used.
- Lighting designed to ensure that visually impaired people can see in public areas.
- Accurate information about the venue, including its facilities.
- Promotional materials in easy read format.
- Free or discounted tickets for people with non physical disabilities.
- Free or discounted tickets for carers accompanying a person with a disability.
- Better trained staff at venues.
- Integrated and flexible wheelchair designated areas to reduce exclusion, with good sight lines.
- Quiet spaces.

*'Accessibility is key. A low level bar, box office would be wonderful. People have a right to be treated the same as everyone else. If the bar was raised to 8 foot tall all hell would break loose!'*

## **Conclusion:**

This research has sought to gather the views of both people with impairments and people without impairments to explore whether the current standards of access for events and festivals are meeting the needs of the community.

It is clear from the evidence of both stakeholders and respondents of the online survey that the current standards for access are not only excluding people with impairments, but also the social circle, including family members, from accessing festivals and events. It is noticeable the commonality of the issues identified and the solutions offered between the online survey and the stakeholder group are evident.

## **Appendix 1: A Fairer Scotland for Disabled People**

‘A Fairer Scotland for Disabled People (2016)’ is a Scottish Government policy to ensure that barriers are removed that currently stop disabled people from taking part in everyday life.

It has Five Ambitions, including ‘Places that are accessible to everyone’ with a subsection ‘Culture and Leisure’. The four Actions identified in this section are:

68. A new help guide from VisitScotland giving practical advice to businesses and setting out key accessibility hints and tips will meet the needs of disabled people attending events.

69. Scotland's heritage is an important part of our identity, and disabled people should have equal access to it. We will improve physical and online access to the historic environment and collections by 2019 so that more disabled people can enjoy their heritage.

70. Creative Scotland's future plans, and revised Equalities Outcomes - to be published in April 2017 - will be informed by their review of equality, diversity and inclusion in the arts, screen and creative industries.

71. We will ensure barriers to accessing and participating in Scotland's culture are broken down. The new Cultural Strategy will be owned by the people of Scotland and will be co-created with practitioners and cultural delivery bodies across the sector.

## **Appendix 2: Bella Freak Multi Agency Stakeholder Discussions**

### **Essential List for an inclusive Festival**

#### Accessibility:

- Information – Easy Read, Plain English on promotional materials, signage and the website.
- Personnel on site – Easily identifiable paid British Sign Language staff and Personal Assistants. MAKATON to be considered for future events. Volunteer Fetch and Carriers.
- Facilities on site – Induction loops, Changing Place units, Ramps, Non Slip Surfaces, Coloured Guide Floor Tape / Guide Rope Rails, Drop Down Bar Area / Table Service, Low Counter Box Office / Mobile Online Ticketing.
- Chill out area.
- Assistance dogs' area.
- Large First Aid area.
- Additional – Drop off / Pick up Area adjacent to the venue.

#### **Wish List**

- First aid workers used to, or trained, to work with people with disabilities, such as NHS staff.
- Relaxation area for staff and volunteers.
- List of quiet areas in the vicinity.
- Blankets for attendees.

#### **Outwith Bella Freak's Control**

- Reduced taxi fares