



Shift in Perspective

An Arts and Disability Resource Pack



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Contents

First published in 2010 by Arts and Disability Ireland

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Arts Council / An Chomhairle Ealaíon, Irish Museum of Modern Art,
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'How to...organise and promote assisted performances' was
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Photography by Josephine Browne, Sarah Cairns,
Ros Kavanagh, Lawnmowers Independent Theatre Company,
Denis Mortell, Patrick Redmond.

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A CIP catalogue record for this book is
available from the British Library.

ISBN: 978-0-9554749-1-0

Copyeditor: Rachel McNicholl
Design: NewGraphic.ie
Printer: Hudson Killeen

Typeset in New Century Schoolbook by Linotype
and Akkurat by Lineto.
Cover printed on Splendorgel Extra White paper, made of pure
environmentally friendly FSC pulp. Inside pages printed on
Cocoon Offset, 100% recycled paper manufactured from
FSC-certified, recycled, de-inked pulp.

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Introduction

Background to Shift in Perspectives

This resource pack is the result of a partnership between the Arts Council / An Chomhairle Ealaíon, Arts & Disability Ireland (ADI), Mayo County Council, the Irish Museum of Modern Art (IMMA) and South Tipperary County Council. It grew out of the partner organisations' work to develop innovative approaches in high-quality contemporary arts and disability practice, and to make arts venues more accessible to artists and audiences with disabilities. The material is based on three specific initiatives: the Arts and Disability Networking Pilot, the Altered Images exhibition, and an audio description and captioning programme for theatre. The resource pack aims to capture the learning from these initiatives and share its practical application with artists and all who work in professional and community-based venues, galleries, theatres and related arts organisations.

The first initiative described is the Arts and Disability Networking Pilot (ADNP). In 2008, the Arts Council, ADI and Mayo County Council came together to pilot a new model of developing local capacity in the area of arts and disability. In brief, the ADNP model offered training and support to artists and venue personnel based in Mayo as a means of extending the scope of arts and disability practice in the county. It also promoted the presentation of high-quality, professional arts and disability work in local venues. During the pilot, the partners developed a set of guiding principles that are included in this pack as a resource for other local development initiatives.

The second initiative was Altered Images, an exhibition which explored issues around improving access to the visual arts. It was developed in partnership by Mayo County Council, South Tipperary County Council and IMMA. Case Study One describes the partnership and the exhibition, and suggests how the knowledge acquired can be applied in practice.

The fact that the Altered Images exhibition took place in Mayo during the same period as the Arts and Disability Networking Pilot added significant value to the latter. It enabled venue personnel, artists and disabled and non-disabled audiences to engage with the visual arts in new ways, and raised challenging questions about the way we programme and present art in our gallery spaces.

The third initiative was the development of audio described and captioned theatre performances. Case Study Two describes ADI's partnership with the Abbey Theatre. Their work in developing audio description and captioning for performances increased awareness of audience needs and helped to grow new audiences.

Each of the three initiatives yielded specific resources, which are contained in this pack. They include practical advice on:

- How to...promote a holistic approach to arts and disability at local level
- How to...organise and promote accessible exhibitions
- How to...organise and promote assisted performances

The concluding section contains advice on:

- How to...shift perspectives on people, spaces and communication

We hope that the resource pack will answer some questions and provide useful advice and information about improving access in venues and for events, at every budget level. The work that led to this publication highlights how important it is to consider the needs of people with disabilities from the outset when venues are being designed or arts events conceived.

We acknowledge that this resource pack may raise many new questions, which may go unanswered for the present. However, as the ADNP model is rolled out, there is potential to capture further learning and generate further resources.

In the meantime, we hope that this publication will help all those working in professional and community-based venues, galleries, theatres and related arts organisations to address issues of equity and artform development more effectively. In creating conditions where the arts are more accessible and inclusive, we will not only reach new artists and audiences but also enable the production of work that is more artistically ambitious and innovative.

A note on language used in the pack

The term **disability** is used with reference to all definitions used in Irish equality and disability legislation.⁽¹⁾ The term **people with disabilities** encompasses age, gender, ethnicity and interest, as well as other identities listed in equality legislation. The disabilities or impairments may be visible or invisible, longstanding or temporary.

In an Irish context **the disability community** has evolved through consensus politics as a broad coalition of people with disabilities; their families and friends; advocates and professionals working in the field; and representative/service organisations.

While language and terminology are continually debated and open to change, **people with disabilities** is currently the term most widely used and accepted by the disability community in the Republic of Ireland, the emphasis being on the person ahead of the disability.

In Britain and Northern Ireland **disabled people** is the preferred term, the emphasis being on the disabling of people through the physical, institutional, systemic, economic and attitudinal barriers that society creates rather than on an individual's disability/impairment. This terminology aligns **disabled people** with other minority groups such as 'black people' and is rooted in identity politics.

(1) The most relevant acts are the Equality Act 2004, which amended the Employment Equality Act 1998 and the Equal Status Act 2000, and the Disability Act 2005. Information about and summaries of the legislation are available from the Equality Authority (www.equality.ie).

Both terms – ‘people with disabilities’ and ‘disabled people’ – are seen in their separate jurisdictions as responses to the social model of disability. In this resource pack, information and guidelines were compiled by authors working in collaboration with arts practitioners and partner organisations in Ireland and internationally. So while we have used ‘people with disabilities’ throughout, other usage is as preferred or accepted by the respective author or disability/impairment group.

The approaches described in this pack are also based on the social model of disability, which understands that ‘it is society that disables people with impairments, by the way in which it is organised and by the conventions and priorities it displays. For example, many buildings are inaccessible to people with impaired mobility, but this results from specific conventions and traditions in building design rather than being an inevitable consequence of mobility impairment.’⁽²⁾

2006 Abbey Theatre production of
The Importance of Being Earnest,
with Alan Stanford as Lady Bracknell

(2) www.artsanddisability.ie



The Arts and Disability Networking Pilot: A local development initiative

The purpose

The Arts and Disability Networking Pilot (ADNP) was initiated by the Arts Council / An Chomhairle Ealaíon (hereafter the Arts Council) as a means of delivering on its commitments as expressed in **Partnership for the Arts: Arts Council Goals 2006–2010**,⁽³⁾ and in response to the need for strategic networking and capacity building in the area of arts and disability at local level.

The Arts Council established a partnership with Arts & Disability Ireland (ADI) and Mayo County Council Arts Service in 2008 to develop and pilot an effective networking model that incorporated four key elements:

- The delivery of Disability Equality Training to venues and individual artists.
- The provision of support to venues and individual artists in order to enable them to develop access audits and extend the scope of arts and disability practice.
- The presentation of high-quality, professional, contemporary arts and disability work in a local venue (or venues).
- The generation and dissemination of resources relating to good practice in the area of arts and disability.

The partners

The Arts Council is the Irish national development agency for the arts. Within the Arts Council, the Arts Participation Team led the project as a means of delivering on strategic objectives in the area of arts and disability. The Local Arts Team was fully involved from the outset, to build professional capacity, disseminate key learning and forge strategic links with other local authorities in this area of development.

Arts & Disability Ireland works at national level to promote the engagement of people with disabilities in the arts at the highest level, as audience members, artists, performers, participants, advisers and employees. The networking pilot provided an excellent vehicle for testing new approaches to addressing the issue of integrated local development.

Mayo County Council Arts Service has a history of consistent arts and disability practice, both within the local authority and through partnership initiatives involving disability organisations, individual artists and venues. In 2007 they commissioned an experienced arts and disability theatre practitioner to conduct research into the arts and disability environment in the county, and subsequently employed him as a part-time Disability Arts Co-ordinator in 2008.

Further factors that made Mayo arts service the ideal partner for the ADNP included a number of long-standing projects supporting artists and film-makers with learning disabilities; a cohort of individual artists and venue staff who were keen to get involved in a capacity-building initiative; and a receptive environment for programming contemporary professional arts and disability work because of the strong linkages between the arts sector and the disability sector.

⁽³⁾ Most particularly to assist artists in realising their artistic ambitions and to make it possible for people to extend and enhance their experience of the arts.

The pilot

The first phase of the pilot ran from November 2008 to May 2010 and involved:

- Delivery of disability equality training to 16 staff from five arts venues in Mayo⁽⁴⁾ and 13 individual artists from across the county.
- A follow-up programme which included a visit to the Altered Images exhibition in Ballina Arts Centre and a series of support visits to individual venues. The purpose of these visits was to assist venue staff in identifying and addressing access issues, not only in terms of physical access but also in terms of the broader organisational approach to programming, marketing, staffing and governance.



Members of Scannán film-makers' group participating in a Lawnmowers Independent Theatre Company workshop, Ballina, 2009

- Organisation of two events to showcase and promote quality contemporary arts and disability work:
 - A four-day residency by the Lawnmowers Independent Theatre Company, a professional group of learning-disabled actors from the UK, in November 2009. The Lawnmowers delivered a series of workshops for learning-disabled artists and film-makers in Westport and Ballina. They delivered a masterclass for theatre practitioners from the region, which took place in Castlebar, and they performed their latest show, **Cabaret of Fools**, in the Linenhall Arts Centre to an audience of 115.
 - A screening of 40 short films by learning-disabled film-makers in December 2009 to an audience of 100 in Ballina Arts Centre. This was under the auspices of the Oska Bright Film Festival, a Brighton-based organisation run by and for people with learning disabilities. The festival tours widely and has been visiting Dublin regularly since 2007, through a partnership with ADI. As part of the ADNP initiative, the Oska Bright team delivered a film-making masterclass to members of Scannán, a Ballina-based group with experience of making documentaries and animated films. **Tom and Mary**, a short film written, produced and directed by the Scannán group, was audio described in Ireland and screened as part of the festival.

(4) The venues were: Áras Inis Gluaire, Belmullet; Ballina Arts Centre; Ballinglen Arts Foundation, Ballycastle; Custom House Studios, Westport; and Linenhall Arts Centre, Castlebar.

The outcomes

An evaluation of the first phase of the pilot (to May 2010) highlighted many successful outcomes at local and national level, particularly in relation to effective networking, resource-sharing, resource-development and programming. It also pin-pointed specific challenges that need to be addressed as the pilot moves into its second phase (in Galway) and identified a range of exciting opportunities to develop the model in the future. There are plans to roll out the model in partnership with other local authority arts offices around the country. This will provide an important opportunity to build on the learning from Mayo and develop the model in ways that are regionally appropriate, taking account of existing resources and needs that have been identified at local level.

The publication of this resource pack is a further opportunity to harness and disseminate learning from the ADNP model, as well as from other innovative developments in the area of arts and disability.

2010 Blue Teapot production of **A Midsummer Night's Dream**, Titania (Nuala Ní Channainn) enamoured of an ass (Patrick Becker)



How to... promote a holistic approach to arts and disability at local level

In the course of the Arts and Disability Networking Pilot (ADNP), representatives from the Arts Council, Arts & Disability Ireland and Mayo County Council spent time considering the values that underpinned their work and developed a set of guiding principles. These principles are based on the social model of disability. It is hoped that they will contribute to a specifically Irish model of arts and disability practice relevant to both urban and rural contexts.

These principles are a work in progress and do not represent a definitive position. They will be further informed and developed by those who become involved in each new phase of the ADNP initiative. They have been incorporated into this resource pack as means of promoting reflection and discussion among other groups interested in similar initiatives.

The core elements of a local networking model

- The key stakeholders: local authorities, venues, individual artists, disability organisations and individual people with disabilities are key stakeholders in improving access and participation and extending artistic ambition in the area of arts and disability.
- The model: the optimal model for achieving meaningful advancement in arts and disability is one that connects and integrates all these stakeholders in developing practice at local level.
- Training: disability equality training is an effective way to bring people together on a county/regional basis to explore attitudes, consider access, discuss opportunities and explore a broad range of arts and disability work including professional contemporary arts and disability practice.
- Support: providing tailored support to enable venues to conduct access audits and individual artists to extend their practice is an important way to build capacity for the future.
- Programming: programming high-quality contemporary arts work in local venues and developing continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities for disabled and non-disabled artists are effective ways of extending ambition in the area of arts and disability.
- International context: it is important to look at contemporary arts and disability practice in other countries as a means of continuously challenging and extending practice in Ireland.

The artist

- ‘The artist is the artist’, i.e. a practitioner who is highly skilled and accomplished in their discipline.
- Some people with disabilities may start out as participants but wish to progress into professional training and development to become artists. It is important that there is space to explore opportunities available at local, regional and national level and, if necessary, to consider the development of new and realistic progression routes.
- Project managers/trainers should be encouraged to advocate, support and facilitate the engagement between artist and group without trying to ‘replace’ the artist.

The practice

- The practice is person-centred, i.e. projects should be based around the self-identified interests/needs of the participants, who should be involved as fully as possible in the planning, management and evaluation of a project.
- There should be no presumption that the artistic interests/needs of individual people with disabilities can be second guessed by either non-disabled or disabled ‘representatives’.
- In the context of an integrated performance/exhibition, the work of both disabled and non-disabled artists should be featured on an equal footing, i.e. it is not about showcasing the talents of a non-disabled artist by using a group of disabled artists in secondary roles.
- The process needs to prioritise opportunities for meaningful learning over the production and presentation of work.
- Aims and outcomes should be considered and clearly articulated

- There is room for both long-term and short-term initiatives but in general, long term initiatives should be prioritised as they offer opportunities for meaningful artistic development.
- An ‘ending’ strategy is needed so that projects don’t go on without any real aims or outcomes. Where projects continue over a long period of time, the organisers need to ask: ‘Whose needs are being met?’

Ownership

- The ownership of work should be considered, discussed and agreed with all stakeholders in advance.

Partnerships

- The aims of all stakeholders should be articulated and acknowledged e.g. if the project is taking place in a care setting, then the aims of the carers need to be taken into account alongside those of the participants, the artist and the funders; this is an additional piece of work and needs to be built into the planning process along with a process for reflection and evaluation.
- Similarly the roles of all stakeholders should be clearly articulated and agreed along with a mechanism to address any difficulties or misunderstandings that might arise in the course of the project.
- The nature and implications of the work should be considered by all stakeholders; if the work has the potential to place a stakeholder in a vulnerable or compromised position (whether the person is a participant or a manager in a healthcare setting where work is being made), this needs to be flagged and discussed otherwise permission to exhibit/perform/screen the work may not be forthcoming and participants may be let down.

Case Study One: Altered Images – an accessible exhibition

The Altered Images exhibition came about through collaboration between Mayo County Council's Arts Office, South Tipperary County Council's Arts Service and the Irish Museum of Modern Art (IMMA). The project was initiated in 2007; drawing primarily on their respective art collections, the partner organisations wanted to assemble an exhibition that would enhance the viewing experience of the spectator and introduce new ways of experiencing art, for disabled and non-disabled visitors alike.

The idea of collating an entire exhibition with an emphasis on accessibility in a multidimensional way was relatively new in Ireland. People could engage with the artworks to a higher degree, experiencing them with greater intensity through the tactility of relief models, listening to audio and artists' descriptions and viewing the sign language interpretation by artist Amanda Coogan. The exhibition therefore worked – and still works – on many levels. (5)

Curatorial decisions were taken in selecting artwork from the collections of the partner organisations to ensure a cohesive body of work. The exhibition also included new works by Daphne Wright and Amanda Coogan, commissioned specifically for the project.

(5) The Altered Images exhibition was still touring in 2010 as this publication went to press, and plans were in place for a further tour in 2011.



...an exhibition that would enhance the viewing experience of the spectator and introduce new ways of experiencing art, for disabled and non-disabled visitors alike.



Above: Altered Images, IMMA, August 2010. The image shows the navigational handrail and tactile flooring designed for the exhibition. The installation shot includes two prints by Alice Maher, **The Snail Chronicles (Fever Bush)** and **The Snail Chronicles (Double Drawing)**, 2005, Intaglio print, 53 x 49.5 cm each, Collection South Tipperary County Council, Purchase 2008, and the three-dimensional interpretation of **The Snail Chronicles (Fever Bush)** by Loz Simpson.

Left: Alice Maher, **The Snail Chronicles (Fever Bush)**, 2005

Multisensory display

The scale of the exhibition was determined by available resources, as it was decided early on that each artwork would need to be accompanied by a multisensory display in order to provide meaningful access:

- A three-dimensional interpretation created by Loz Simpson of Topografik. These interpretations varied in scale and materials, all relating to the respective original. The primary concerns were conveying the essence of the original artwork, access, quality of materials and tactility.
- An MP3 player containing an audio description of the original artwork and an audio navigation of the tactile interpretation (these tracks were created by Anne Hornsby of Mind's Eye); also an audio track by the artist outlining the artistic process and details about the artwork.
- Labels in large print and Braille.
- In addition, artist Amanda Coogan was commissioned to provide an interpretation of the exhibition, using sign language in a filmed performance.

Altered Images, IMMA, August 2010. The image shows the three-dimensional interpretation on a plinth by Loz Simpson, with audio and Braille labelling, placed alongside the original artwork by Thomas Brezing, **It has the untidiness of a real event**, 2007.



Top: Altered Images, IMMA, August 2010, close-up of the three-dimensional interpretation by Loz Simpson, with Braille labelling

Above: Thomas Brezing, **It has the untidiness of a real event**, 2007, Oil on paper, 29 x 42 cm, Collection Mayo County Council, Purchase 2007

Additional features at IMMA

- Tactile flooring with a textured surface and contrasting colours to let visitors know when they had arrived at an artwork.
- A handrail to aid navigation of the spaces; it also had markers to indicate when a visitor was near an artwork.

Other access provision

- Large-print, hand-held labels at each venue.
- A catalogue available in multiple formats (large print, Braille, audio CD).
- An accessible website (www.alteredimages.ie).
- Sign-language tours by arrangement.
- An access and education programme at each venue, tailored to the needs of visiting groups; talks and workshops by facilitators and artists.
- Disability equality training and detailed briefings on the exhibition and access provision for all exhibition venue staff.

Image on page 26–27: Altered Images, IMMA, August 2010

On the right, three-dimensional interpretation on a plinth, by Loz Simpson, with audio and Braille labelling, with navigational tactile flooring leading towards the plinth

On the left, original artwork by Caroline McCarthy, **The Luncheon**, 2002, Photograph of still-life made from wet toilet paper, black bin-bags, real stalks, fake flies and disposable tableware, 114 x 196 cm, Collection Irish Museum of Modern Art, Donated by AIB, 2002

Conclusions

All of the partner organisations learned a great deal from putting this challenging exhibition together. Practical issues included selecting accessible venues, delivering disability equality training to the relevant staff of each venue, selecting/designing suitable materials, developing ways of displaying the work, dealing with scale, and communicating with target audiences. The partners viewed this process as opening up a discussion that will feed into future possibilities in terms of accessibility and the arts, both physically and notionally.

Acknowledgements

This exhibition would not have been possible without the gracious cooperation of the artists involved, who participated so openly and generously: Thomas Brezing, Amanda Coogan, David Creedon, Caroline McCarthy, Alice Maher, Abigail O'Brien and Daphne Wright.

The project was funded by the Irish Museum of Modern Art, South Tipperary County Council and Mayo County Council, with support funding from the Arts Council. Support for the education and outreach element of the programme came from the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government and the Department of Education and Science. The exhibition was hosted by South Tipperary County Museum and Ballina Arts Centre in 2009 and IMMA in 2010.



How to...

organise and promote accessible exhibitions

The following guidelines were compiled as an outcome of work on the Altered Images exhibition and may be useful to others when planning inclusive visual arts initiatives.

Multisensory display

A number of high-tech and remote guiding systems are available to enable visitors navigate a space independently, but they are often very expensive. It is essential to consider the space you want to use or that is available, and maximise its accessibility, before looking into high-tech guiding systems.

The following are suggestions to bear in mind when considering what sort of space to use:

- The ideal is an open space with no obstacles (e.g. pillars) to negotiate.
- Immovable obstacles (e.g. pillars, plinths) should be clearly marked.
- Works should be displayed in a consistent format, e.g. around the walls or on one side of the space.
- Avoid displaying works in the centre of a space where possible.
- Ensure there is appropriate lighting for ease of navigation.

- A handrail could be fixed to the wall with various markings to indicate areas of significance or obstacles.
- Tactile floor tiles with contrasting colours and different surfaces could be used to indicate points of significance and aid general orientation.
- An audio guide could be used to complement a handrail and/or floor tiles.
- Mediators could be available to give assistance.

Further advice on physical access is available through Arts & Disability Ireland (ADI) at www.adiarts.ie and/or the National Council for the Blind of Ireland at www.ncbi.ie.

New works and accessibility

When collecting, purchasing or curating works which you wish to make accessible through audio description, three-dimensional interpretation or touch tours, be mindful of the following:

- It is not necessarily an artist's job to make their work accessible.
- Let the artist whose work you wish to make accessible know what your intentions are at the earliest opportunity.
- If the original work has been specially commissioned for an event, wait until it is complete before bringing in an audio describer or interpretive artist.
- If you would like to ask an artist to contribute an audio file about their work, do so at the earliest opportunity.

Three-dimensional interpretations

If you want a work to be accompanied by a three-dimensional interpretation, involve the interpretive artist at the earliest possible stage.

Once you have identified the works to be interpreted:

- Furnish the interpretive artist with relevant information and images of the original works.
- Ensure the interpretive artist can view the original works at the earliest opportunity and work in parallel or in collaboration with other access workers, e.g. audio describers.
- Agree materials to be used in the creation of the interpretations.
- Agree deadlines for completion of interpretations.

Audio description

If you want a work to be accompanied by audio description, it is important to involve an audio describer at the earliest possible stage. Once you have identified the describer and the works to be described:

- Furnish the describer with relevant information and images.
- Ensure they can view the space at the earliest opportunity.
- Ensure they can view the original artworks as early as possible and work in parallel or in collaboration with other access workers, e.g. those making physical interpretations.
- Furnish the describer with details or a manual of the audio equipment you intend to use.
- Agree deadlines for completion of audio descriptions.
- Build in time for any editing.
- Build in time for recording and copying of descriptions on to audio equipment.

There are now a number of audio describers working in Ireland and they can be contacted through ADI at www.adiarts.ie.

Staff and training

When planning an accessible visual arts initiative, staff and/or volunteers will play a vital role. It is therefore important to build in relevant support. Training in the following areas would be of benefit to staff, mediators and volunteers:

- Disability equality training
- Orientation and guiding techniques
- Basic audio description

Further advice on training is available through ADI at www.adiarts.ie (under Customer Care).

Access for deaf or hearing-impaired visitors

Bear the following in mind if you want to make exhibitions more accessible for people who are deaf or have hearing difficulties:

- You could offer sign language interpreted tours by arrangement.
- You may wish to commission an artist proficient in sign language to create a signed performance piece as a response to your project, which then could be subtitled.
- Any information provided by artists about their works in audio format should be transcribed into print (preferably large print for general accessibility) and Braille.

Further information is available through the Sign Language Interpreting Service at www.slis.ie.

Access for visually impaired visitors

Bear the following in mind if you want to make exhibitions more accessible for people with visual impairments:

- Catalogues should be produced in Braille, large print and where possible on CD ROM and audio CD.
- Large-print materials, such as hand-held labels, can be used to direct visitors round an exhibition.
- Labels on plinths should be produced in large print and Braille.
- Wall texts, leaflets and other general information should be produced in large print.
- An accessible website with audio and print information could be developed.
- Exhibition staff could provide tours and information about the artists and the work.

Further information about accessible formats and transcription services is available through the National Council for the Blind of Ireland at www.ncbi.ie.

Access for visitors with intellectual disabilities

Bear the following in mind if you want to make exhibitions more accessible for people with intellectual disabilities:

- Some people with intellectual disabilities will visit an event independently or with friends.
- Some people with intellectual disabilities will visit in groups with support staff.
- Where possible, printed material should be written in plain language.
- Where possible, provide an image of the artist as well as their name for ease of identification.
- Workshops could be designed to elicit groups' responses to your exhibition. There are a number of artists who specialise in this area.

For further information contact the National Institute for Intellectual Disability at www.tcd.ie/niid.

Case Study Two: Assisted performances at the Abbey Theatre

Introduction

Arts & Disability Ireland (ADI) is the sole provider of audio description and captioning services for live performances in the Republic of Ireland. Audio description provides blind and visually impaired people with a simultaneous commentary on the visual elements of a performance. Captioning is similar to television subtitling, giving deaf, deafened and hard-of-hearing people access to live performances. The actors' words appear on a display unit (or units) on or near the stage at the same time as they are spoken or sung. Speakers' names, sound effects and offstage noises are also shown.

The Abbey and ADI audio description pilot

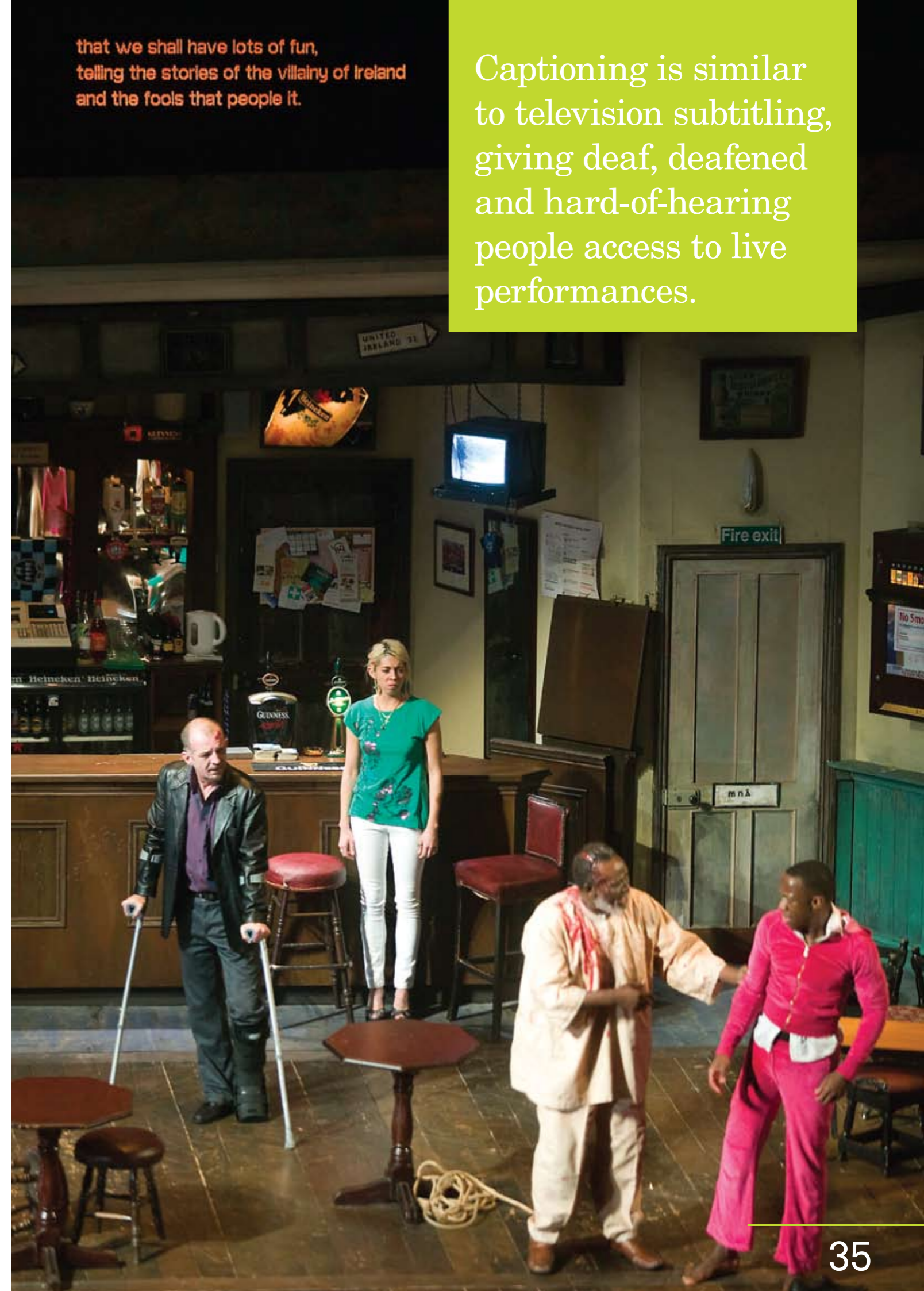
In April 2006, with the assistance of Theatre Forum, Arts & Disability Ireland (ADI) sought the Abbey's participation in an audio description pilot project for live theatre. ADI engaged the services of Sight Lines, a group of audio describers based in Belfast who had worked with the Lyric Theatre and several other venues in Northern Ireland over a number of years.

The overall purpose of the pilot was to assess the viability and sustainability of audio description in the Republic of Ireland; the potential for establishing an equipment-lending service; and the option of training and developing of a pool of locally based audio describers.

Captioned performance of the
2007 Abbey Theatre production of
The Playboy of the Western World

that we shall have lots of fun,
telling the stories of the villainy of Ireland
and the fools that people it.

Captioning is similar
to television subtitling,
giving deaf, deafened
and hard-of-hearing
people access to live
performances.



Case Study Two: Assisted performances at the Abbey Theatre

The Abbey Theatre and the Dublin Theatre Festival agreed to take part on a three-play basis. The three plays audio described in 2006 were **The Importance of Being Earnest** by Oscar Wilde, **Doubt** by John Patrick Shanley and **Orestes** by Helen Edmondson. The first two were performed at the Abbey, the third at the Olympia Theatre during the Dublin Theatre Festival.

Building on the pilot

At the end of 2006 ADI secured capital funding from the Arts Council to purchase audio description and captioning equipment as well as a portable loop system. At this time, captioners and audio describers were brought in from the UK, and it was not until 2008/2009 that a locally based pool of two captioners and three audio describers was realised, when UK companies Stage Text and the Audio Description Association were commissioned to audition and train in Dublin.

In 2007 the Abbey Theatre continued its support for assisted performances with ADI by premiering its first captioned performance for patrons who are deaf and hard of hearing, a new version of **The Playboy of the Western World** by Bisi Adigun and Roddy Doyle. A single unit was flown above the set, which for this version was a modern-day west Dublin pub.

In the early days of assisted performances, audio described and captioned performances happened on separate days. It was not until the Abbey staged the UK National Theatre production of Samuel Beckett's **Happy Days** in 2008 that a simultaneous captioned and audio described performance was provided.

Since 2009 assisted performances have become a standard part of the Abbey Theatre's repertoire. Three months before opening night, the model box (a scale model of the set) is presented so that logistical matters such as placement of unit(s), obstruction issues and seat allocation can be considered. The Abbey has settled into a routine of placing the units on extreme left and right of the stage, either resting on the edge of the stage or anchored on stilts in the auditorium.



Above: Two scenes from a captioned performance of the 2007 Abbey Theatre production of **The Playboy of the Western World**

Left: Roisin Dermody listening to audio description of the 2007 Abbey Theatre production of **The Playboy of the Western World**

Far left: A captioner prepares for the 2007 Abbey Theatre production of **The Playboy of the Western World**



Case Study Two: Assisted performances at the Abbey Theatre

Scripts are made available and the production is recorded on opening night, then distributed to captioners and audio describers, who spend between 60 and 80 hours working on their scripts and visit the theatre numerous times to revise them. The first assisted performance is usually three to five weeks after opening night.

As a result of auditorium meetings with the Irish Hard of Hearing Association, seat selection and allocation are prioritised at the box office for visitors who are hard of hearing or visually impaired, ensuring the best possible experience for all patrons.

In 2010 the Abbey Theatre celebrated ten years of Irish Sign Language (ISL) on stage, with ISL now being part of every production run on the Peacock and main stages.

For Mark O’Rowe’s **Terminus** in 2009, the Abbey achieved a first, introducing one-on-one character interpretation. This was an exciting development for sign-language interpretation of theatre and performance, allowing the interpreters to be true to the actors on stage as well as to the words of the playwright.

The Abbey’s assisted performances are coordinated by its Engage and Learn team, formerly the Outreach department. They are marketed in the events calendar and programmes, on the website, in production flyers, on postcards, in direct emails to patrons in their database, via press emails and national newspapers. Tickets can be booked online, by email, over the phone or in person.

Other venues

A number of other venues in the Dublin area occasionally provide assisted performances; these have included Axis Ballymun, the Project Arts Centre and, as part of the Dublin Theatre Festival, the Olympia and Gaiety theatres. It is ADI’s ambition that these services can be extended outside Dublin, either hosted by individual venues or in partnership with production companies, which would allow audio description and captioning to tour with a show.

Scene from the 2007
Abbey Theatre production
of **Terminus**



How to...

organise and promote assisted performances

The following guidelines were compiled as an outcome of collaboration between Arts & Disability Ireland (ADI) and the Abbey Theatre to develop assisted performances. They may be useful to others when planning inclusive performance initiatives.

Assisted performances give audiences with sensory impairments full access to theatre by means of audio description for blind and visually impaired people, and captioning for people who are deaf, deafened or hard of hearing. Deaf people whose first language is Irish Sign Language will most likely have a preference for performances to be sign-interpreted.

Audio description

Audio description in theatre is a live verbal commentary providing information on the visual elements of a production as it unfolds, from sets, props and costumes to actors' facial expressions and movements across the stage. The description is delivered during the quieter moments of a performance and therefore only gives essential information that a blind or visually impaired person might miss. In some venues a touch tour of the set may be available before the performance starts.

Preparing an audio described performance

Each description is prepared and delivered by two describers working as a team, and takes approximately 60–80 hours to complete. They watch a production, study the script and/or score and, using a video/DVD of the production, prepare programme notes, and write their description script.

Programme notes

The describers take notes during their first visit to a performance in order to prepare a description of the set, costumes, characters and style of the piece. This information, referred to as 'programme notes', is recorded on audio CD, transcribed into Braille, prepared in large print and circulated on the internet (e.g. on ADI website or through the Ireland Visually Impaired News email list). These programme notes are sometimes available to customers in advance of their visit to the theatre or on the day of the performance.

Preparation of the audio description script

Away from the theatre, the audio describers prepare the script for their live description following a video/DVD recording of the play. The visual information has to be described succinctly and in keeping with the piece, so it is imperative that the describers become as familiar with the production as possible.

Delivery of audio description

During the assisted performance, the audio description is delivered live, transmitted into the auditorium using a portable radio system, and picked up via a pocket size receiver and earpiece worn by the blind or visually impaired patron. Ideally, audio describers sit in the 'tech box', from where they can see the performance, but in some venues they may need to use an audiovisual feed and deliver the audio description remotely, e.g. from backstage.

How many blind or visually impaired people can attend an audio described performance?

Current capacity in most theatres in the Republic of Ireland that provide audio description is for a maximum of 20 people.

Touch tours

While currently not offered at theatres in the Republic of Ireland, venues can choose to precede an audio described performance with a touch tour. This would usually take place about an hour before the performance and last approximately half an hour. Touch tours further enhance the audio description by giving customers a chance to get up on stage and experience the set, props and costumes, and sometimes meet the cast.

Where are audio described performances provided?

The Abbey Theatre audio describes at least one matinee performance in each run of the theatre's own productions. A number of other venues in the Dublin area occasionally provide audio described performances; these have included Axis Ballymun and, as part of the Dublin Theatre Festival, the Olympia and Gaiety theatres. Arts & Disability Ireland's website (www.adiarts.ie) has an up-to-date calendar of audio described performances.

Booking audio describers and equipment

Audio describers can be booked through Arts & Disability Ireland (ADI), who also provide the audio description equipment as part of the service. See www.adiarts.ie for venue, technical and customer care guides relating to audio described performances.

Captioning

Captioning is similar to television subtitling and gives deaf, deafened and hard of hearing people access to live performances. Captioning converts the spoken word into text, which is displayed on one or more caption units situated on or next to the stage.

As well as dialogue, the captions include the name of the character who is speaking or singing and descriptions of any sound effects. In addition to assisting people with hearing disabilities, captioned performances have been found to benefit foreign visitors and students who are studying the play or learning to speak English.

Preparing a script for a captioned performance

The most up-to-date version of the script is sent to the captioners with a video/DVD of the production. It takes 40 to 50 hours' preparation and rehearsal time in order to format a script. Captioners can either work as a team or on their own. They will see the performance several times to familiarise themselves with the production.

Where are captioned performances provided?

The Abbey Theatre captions at least one matinee performance in each run of the theatre's own productions. A number of other venues in the Dublin area occasionally provide captioned performances; these have included Axis Ballymun, the Project Arts Centre and, as part of the Dublin Theatre Festival, the Gaiety theatre. Arts & Disability Ireland's website (www.adiarts.ie) has an up-to-date calendar of audio described performances.

Booking captioners and equipment

Captioners can be booked through Arts & Disability Ireland (ADI), who also provide the captioning units as part of the service. See www.adiarts.ie for venue, technical and customer care guides relating to captioned performances.

Sign language interpreted performances

Irish Sign Language (ISL) is the sign language used in the Republic of Ireland. The language makes use of space and involves movement of the hands, body, face and head. A sign language interpreter interprets what an actor says simultaneously, or just after the actor has spoken.

Logistical requirements for ISL interpreted performance

When a performance is ISL interpreted the signer usually stands on a raised area, to the side of the stage. Sign language interpreters need to be clearly visible. This means that there should be indirect clear lighting on the interpreter, especially on the face and hands. There should be no source of light behind the interpreter.

Preparing for an ISL interpreted performance

Interpreters are able to deliver a higher quality of service when they have been able to attend the performance, and have received a script and video/DVD in advance, allowing sufficient time for them to research unfamiliar words and concepts before the signed performance. It is important to remember that the interpreter will have their back to the performance while interpreting to the audience.

Booking a sign language interpreter

Sign language interpreters can be booked through the Sign Language Interpreting Service at www.slis.ie.

Where are sign language interpreted performances provided?

The Abbey Theatre and Peacock provide at least one sign language interpreted performance in each run of the theatre's own productions.

Booking tickets for captioned and sign language interpreted performances

There are a number of ways to improve booking facilities at your theatre for customers who are deaf, deafened or hard of hearing. These include online booking and booking by fax, email and text messaging.

Loop systems

All loop systems should be regularly checked to ensure they are functioning correctly. The different loop systems described below enable people with hearing aids to receive sounds from within a specific area directly into their hearing device.

Induction loops

A loop system comprises a loop of wire, an amplifier and either an ambient microphone or a direct connection to a sound desk. If a hearing aid is set to its 'T' setting, a tiny coil within the hearing aid responds to the magnetic waves transmitted by the loop. This enables someone with a hearing aid to tune in to just what they want to hear without interference from background noise.

Portable loop systems

Arts & Disability Ireland (ADI) has a portable loop system available for hire at a nominal fee to arts organisations. This system is suitable for use in auditoriums of up to approximately 200 seats depending on layout or proportions of an auditorium. This portable loop system has been operated successfully in Axis Ballymun, the Project Arts Centre and the Olympia Theatre. Contact Arts & Disability Ireland (www.adiarts.ie) for further information.

Infrared system

An infrared system is an alternative to a loop system. It consists of a transmitter and listening receiver. Sound is fed to the transmitter in the same way as with the loop system, either by a direct connection from the sound desk or via a microphone. It is then transmitted as an invisible infrared light to where the deaf person is sitting and received either via a headset (like a small pair of headphones) or a 'necklace' device (which functions like a mini individual loop).

How to... shift perspectives on accessibility

Introduction

The opportunity has never been greater in Ireland to improve access to arts venues for artists with disabilities, project participants and audience members. The background to this was significant legislative change, starting with the Employment Equality Act 1998 and the Equal Status Act 2000, both of which were subsequently amended by the Equality Act 2004, and later the Disability Act 2005. In parallel, a range of arts and disability projects developed, as did arts organisations throughout Ireland working with people with disabilities. Most organisations of people with disabilities work within a social model context, and it is within this context that these access guidelines for venues have been written.

There is a common misconception that the way to address the access barriers faced by people with disabilities in a social model context means addressing physical access only – ramps, toilets, lifts etc. There is a sense that once the physical environment is adequate, disabled audiences will magically arrive.

It is now generally accepted that this is not the case, and recent experience has shown that venue managers are becoming interested in developing a more holistic approach to accessibility. This means not simply addressing the physical access barriers, but also looking at how publicity and promotional information can be made more accessible. We need to ask what technical solutions can be put in place and what attitudinal changes need to be made in order to improve access for people with disabilities.

Disability equality training

A starting point to develop a more rounded approach to access is through disability equality training (DET). This focuses on the barriers encountered by people with disabilities when they wish to participate in arts and cultural events and on ways in which these barriers can be effectively overcome. The barriers that inhibit access can be informational, technical or attitudinal.

The opportunity has never been greater in Ireland to improve access to arts venues for artists with disabilities, project participants and audience members.

Access audit

Another way of assessing a venue's current access provision is through an access audit. This may involve completing a self-assessment access questionnaire, which is followed by a tour of the venue by an access auditor and a discussion of access issues. Such an audit can be very helpful to evaluate true access provision. In addition to the physical access of a venue, other forms of access are now being taken into consideration, such as printed promotional material, websites, marketing, programming, policies, recruitment and equality budgets. A report is then compiled for the venue, with recommendations as to how access provision could be improved. Access audits and recommendations are designed to implement incremental, manageable changes, not to overwhelm a venue. This approach encourages immediate, practical, low-cost changes such as large-print information sheets and labels accompanying exhibition artworks.

Programming

Although still at an early stage, work by disabled artists is starting to be programmed, increasing the visibility of disabled artists and providing role models to younger disabled people who may be thinking of a career in the arts. Recent examples of arts and disability work produced in Ireland include the following:

- **Fling**, Croí Glan Integrated Dance Company, Firkin Crane, Cork, 2010.
- **Turning Point**, new, short work for theatre by artists with disabilities, presented by Fishamble and ADI, Project Arts Centre, Dublin (went on to VSA International Festival in Washington DC), 2010.
- **A Midsummer Night's Dream**, Blue Teapot Theatre Company, performed in venues across Galway city and county, 2010.
- **On the Wall / Fall**, Croí Glan Integrated Dance Company, Cork Midsummer Festival, 2009.
- **Four Years On**, exhibition by the Luisne Art Project, Linenhall Arts Centre, Castlebar, 2009.
- **Decade**, a retrospective exhibition of KCAT studio artists, KCAT Arts and Study Centre, Callan, Co. Kilkenny, 2009.

International disability work has also been programmed in Irish venues, and recent examples include:

- **From Freak to Clique**, Mat Fraser, Axis Arts Centre Ballymun, 2010.
- **Girl Jonah** (performance **She Was a Knife Thrower's Assistant**, and masterclass), Dublin Dance Festival, 2008.
- **Cabaret of Fools**, Lawnmowers Independent Theatre Company, Linenhall Arts Centre, Castlebar, 2009.
- **Oska Bright Film Festival**, Axis Ballymun, 2010, and Ballina Arts Centre, 2009.

Guidance

We hope that the following 'How to' section will assist venue managers who wish to offer a more inclusive experience by making better access provision for people, spaces and communication. By improving access, they will be able to engage more fully with artists, participants and audience members with disabilities.

Scene from Croí Glan Integrated Dance
Company's production of **This Is**,
choreographed by Adam Benjamin,
Absolut Fringe, Dublin 2010



How to... shift perspectives on people, spaces and communication

Note on language

The term **disability** is used with reference to all definitions used in Irish equality and disability legislation.⁽⁶⁾ The term **people with disabilities** encompasses age, gender, ethnicity and interest, as well as other identities listed in equality legislation. The disabilities or impairments may be visible or invisible, longstanding or temporary.

While language and terminology are continually debated and therefore open to change, **people with disabilities** is currently the term most widely used and accepted in the Republic of Ireland, the emphasis being on the person ahead of the disability.

In Britain and Northern Ireland **disabled people** is the preferred term, the emphasis being on the disabling of people through the physical, institutional, systemic, economic and attitudinal barriers that society creates rather than on an individual's disability/impairment. This terminology aligns **disabled people** with other minority groups such as 'black people' and is rooted in identity politics.

(6) The most relevant acts are the Equality Act 2004, which amended the Employment Equality Act 1998 and the Equal Status Act 2000, and the Disability Act 2005. Information about and summaries of the legislation are available from the Equality Authority (www.equality.ie).

Both terms – 'people with disabilities' and 'disabled people' – are seen in their separate jurisdictions as responses to the social model of disability. In this resource pack, information and guidelines were compiled by authors working in collaboration with arts practitioners and partner organisations in Ireland and internationally. So while we have used 'people with disabilities' throughout, other usage is as preferred or accepted by the respective author or disability/impairment group.

Shifting perspectives...on people

Although every person with a disability is different, there are certain things that should be borne in mind when engaging with people with specific impairments. The following suggestions may therefore be helpful.

Assisting a person who is blind or visually impaired

- When you approach a blind or visually impaired person, remember that they probably won't be aware of your approach.
- Say hello, tell them who you are, and ask if they need assistance. At this point you could touch them lightly on the arm to indicate you are addressing them.
- Offer your arm for the blind or visually impaired person to take just above the elbow. The National Council for the Blind of Ireland provide advice on basic techniques for 'sighted guiding' at the following link: www.ncbi.ie/information-for/friends-and-relatives/guiding-a-person-with-a-vision-impairment.
- When the journey is over make sure the blind or visually impaired person knows where they are, the direction they are facing and where to go next.
- When you leave, tell them that you are going.

Communicating with people who are deaf, deafened or hard of hearing

- Don't assume that all deaf people you meet use sign language or have no hearing at all.
- Face the person, 3-6 feet away, and make sure your face is well lit.
- Make sure the person is looking at you before you start speaking.
- Do not shout as this will distort your lip patterns and make it difficult to lip read.
- Phrases are easier to read than unconnected single words; speak as simply and clearly as possible.
- Repeat words as necessary, but remember that sometimes it is better to change a word as some are harder to lip read.
- Write things down if you need to clarify anything.
- Give the person time to absorb what you have said.
- Keep your head still, your hands away from your face and stop speaking if you turn away.
- Do not eat while you are speaking.
- Use gestures to help you communicate more clearly.
- If you do not understand, let the person know; do not pretend you have understood if you haven't.
- Ask them to repeat or rephrase what you don't understand.
- Use finger spelling if necessary (check that the person knows the manual alphabet first).
- Ask them to write down or indicate what they want if you don't understand.
- Do not give up!

Assisting wheelchair users

- Do not lean on people's wheelchairs: the chair is part of their body space, so this form of intrusion is extremely annoying.
- Speak directly to the person, not to the person or people who may be with them.
- Do not grab the back of someone's wheelchair to push them along. Always ask first if help is required and do not be offended if it is refused.
- Never grab a person's wheelchair when they are manoeuvring it into their car: such well meant help is dangerous and can seriously hurt the disabled person's arm or wrist.
- If you have to negotiate a chair up or down steps, ask the wheelchair user for advice on how best to do it.
- Try to seat or situate yourself at eye level with the person as much as possible. It is extremely difficult to join in conversations which are going on 'over the head', particularly as the conversation is also usually difficult to hear. And try not to stand too near, causing the wheelchair user to have to crane their neck to keep eye contact. These points also apply when meeting disabled people who are of short stature.

Assisting people with speech impairments

- Wait and do not jump in to finish what you think they might be saying.
- Don't pretend you understand if you don't. Ask the person to say it again, and repeat what you understand to gain confirmation.
- If they have a friend or personal assistant acting as a facilitator, use that person only as an interpreter, i.e. do not engage in conversation directly with the facilitator. It is easy in this situation to drop eye contact with the person with a disability. (One reason why some people with speech impairments are reluctant to use a facilitator is that they then may be ignored and effectively cut out of the communication.)
- Persevere. Familiarity usually makes understanding easier.

Assistance dogs

- Assistance dogs are covered by the Equal Status Act 2000 and are generally provided by Irish Guide Dogs. If you use the term 'guide dog', you may be excluding other assistance dogs, so is advisable to use the universal term 'assistance dogs'.
- Be clear about your venue's policy on assistance dogs. Assistance dogs improve access for people in public spaces which might not otherwise be accessible to them, such as supermarkets, restaurants, theatres, and public transport.
- Allow the dog to concentrate and perform for the safety of its handler. So don't touch, talk, feed or otherwise distract the dog while it is wearing its harness.
- Give it the respect due to a working dog and don't treat it as a pet.
- Allow the handler to give commands and ask if the handler needs your assistance.
- Respect the owner's need to give the dog a balanced diet and maintain good habits.
- Have water bowls available for dogs.

Questions visitors with disabilities might ask a theatre or gallery

The following questions will not be relevant to every venue but they will all arise from time to time. While it is unlikely that all staff will immediately be able to answer every question, the important thing is for staff to know where the information is held, or to whom the question should be referred.

- How many wheelchair user spaces do you have?
- Where are they? (Is there a leaflet that shows them?)
- Are there seats without arms or with lift-up arms that I can transfer to from my wheelchair?
- Can you store my wheelchair during the performance?
- Can I retrieve it for the interval?
- Can I make a group booking that will allow wheelchair users and non-disabled members of the group to be accommodated together?

- Is the bar/café wheelchair accessible?
- Must I book ahead if I'm a wheelchair user? ('I know it is advisable, but is it essential?')
- What happens if I just turn up?
- Does your gallery have seating areas throughout the exhibition spaces?
- Does your gallery have a wheelchair available if I find the distances too great to walk?
- Can I get a programme / exhibition catalogue in large print / on audio CD / in Braille / in Plain English?
- Can I bring my guide dog / assistance dog / hearing dog?
- Is there anywhere to take my dog outside in the interval?
- Do you provide audio description of your performances or exhibitions?
- Do you provide pre-show touch tours?
- I'm deaf – how can I book seats?
- Do you accept bookings by email, fax or text?
- Do you have an induction loop or an infrared system in the auditorium? (Or 'What hearing system do you have?')
- Do you provide captioned performances?
- Do you provide sign language interpreted performances?
- Do you provide sign language interpreting and/or a loop system at exhibition launches, tours or artists' talks?
- Do you provide sign language interpreted and/or palantype (speech-to-text) communication support at talks and seminars?
- Do you have accessible parking spaces?
- How close are they to the main entrance / to the rehearsal room entrance?
- I need assistance – can I bring my personal assistant or companion for free?
- Do you offer price reductions for people with disabilities and/or their companions?

Shifting perspectives...on spaces

The function of the checklist below is to highlight relevant information and remind you what you should consider when you set out to check the strengths and weaknesses of a particular venue. This is not a replacement for a full access audit of an arts venue, which should consider accessibility, policy, participation, employment and arts programming. For full technical details on building regulations with regard to access for people with disabilities, people should consult Part M of the government Building Regulations 2000.⁽⁷⁾

Public transport

- What is the distance from bus stops and railway stations (recommended distance is less than 400m)?

Vehicle drop off

- Is there a set-down point near the entrance for vehicles?

Parking

- Are there reserved spaces (5% of total parking spaces) for blue badge holders?
- What is the distance between parking and the entrance (recommended distance is less than 50m)?
- Is the parking location well signposted on entry to the site?
- Are parking spaces the correct size? The parking space itself should be 4800mm x 3600mm, with cross-hatched marking 1200mm x 4800mm to one or both sides and extending 1200mm to the rear of the space to allow a wheelchair user get out of a vehicle and/or a wheelchair to be taken from a vehicle boot?

- Is there a dished kerb (sometimes called 'dropped kerb') near parking spaces?
- Are the parking surfaces smooth (not gravelled)?
- Is the route to the entrance unobstructed, non-gravelled and wide enough (minimum 1200mm)?
- What is the gradient from car park level to entrance – is it level or steep enough to require assistance (maximum gradient should be 1:12)?
- Are any bollards at least 1000mm high, with visually contrasting bands?

Entrance

- Is the entrance accessible for an unaided wheelchair user?
- Is the paving leading to the entrance textured for a visually impaired visitor?
- Is the doormat flush in a mat well rather than raised?
- Is the entrance level or ramped?
- If there is a ramp, what is the gradient (maximum gradient 1:12, 1:15 or 1: 20 preferred)?
- Is the ramp surface non-slip?
- Is there a handrail at 900mm or 1000mm on ramp landings?
- Are there steps, and if so, how many? Are they shallow or deep, with or without handrail? (Recommended measurements: minimum step tread 280mm; maximum step rise 150mm).
- Do handrails turn down or in at the ends?
- Is the handrail diameter 45–50mm, and oval or circular in shape?
- Is there a bell to call for assistance, and if so, at what height (less than 1200mm above finished floor level)?

(7) Building Regulations 2000, Part M: **Technical Guidance Document – Access for People with Disabilities**. Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government. PDF available at www.environ.ie/en/TGD.

Entrance doors

- Do the entrance doors open inwards or outwards?
- Are they automatic or manual?
- If they are manual, is the door pressure heavy or light?
- If they are automatic and revolving, is there an unlocked adjacent door as an alternative?
- How wide is the open entrance?
- If the doors are fully glazed do they have contrast bands across them to highlight their presence (at somewhere between 1200mm and 1500mm high)?
- Are the door handles at an appropriate height (preferably at 900mm)?
- Are the door controls easily gripped and operated and fitted with a lever-type handle?

Inside the building

General questions as above apply to doors. The following should also be considered for internal accessibility:

- Do internal doors have spring-back devices?
- Are there suction pads to hold back fire doors?
- If any internal doors have vision panels, are these full length or at appropriate height for wheelchair users and short disabled people (preferably 500–1800mm high)?
- Is there colour contrast between doors or door surrounds, and between doors and furniture?
- Is access throughout the building level or are ramps permanent?
- Are there any steps, and if so, where and what type?
- Are any changes in level and any steps clearly marked and well lit?
- Are there any platform lifts or stairlifts (see opposite for passenger lifts)?

Lifts (passenger lifts)

- What are the dimensions of lifts (minimum 1100mm wide x 1400mm deep)?
- Is the approach clear (it should be unobstructed 1500mm x 1500mm in front)?
- Are the lift doors automatic or manual?
- If doors are manual, are they light or heavy?
- What is the width of the open door – 800mm clear?
- At what height are the internal controls – 900–1200mm?
- Are the buttons positioned on the side wall?
- Are there tactile buttons (embossed, not engraved)? Are the buttons Braille-marked?
- Is there audio information?
- Are emergency phones or buttons within reach, with controls at less than 1200mm high?
- Is the floor in the lift car non-slip?
- If there is no turning circle space in the lift, is there a mirror on the rear wall (starting at 900mm above floor level and rising to 1800mm) to assist wheelchair users reversing out?
- Is there a handrail on back and side walls (if sufficient space), at 900mm, with a diameter of 35mm?
- Is each floor level clearly identified with the floor number?

How to... shift perspectives on people, spaces and communication

Reception desk / box office

- Is the desk/counter at an appropriate height (maximum 760mm) for wheelchair users or is there provision for a dropped section?
- Is the desk/counter accessible from both sides for wheelchair-using staff as well as visitors?
- Is an induction loop fitted?

Sales or information display areas

- Is there circulation space for wheelchair users, people with assistance dogs or people with impaired mobility who may be using walking aids?
- Are counter heights appropriate and goods within reach (positioned at less than 1500mm high)?
- Is assistance available?

Floor covering

- Is the floor slippery?
- Is it a carpeted or non-carpeted surface?
- If carpet, is it thick, dense or smooth pile?
- Is there colour contrast between floors and walls?



Opposite: Altered Images, IMMA, August 2010

Above: Three-dimensional interpretation by Loz Simpson of **Plura** by Daphne Wright, 2008–09

Below: The image shows the reading area with computer access to the Altered Images website, Zoomtext and JAW software. The wall text was cut in matt vinyl as opposed to gloss for legibility purposes.



Toilets

General questions that should be addressed include:

- Does the space meet minimum requirements for accessible toilets (1500mm wide x 2000mm deep)?
- Is the approach space clear of obstructions?
- Do doors open inwards or outwards (generally should be outwards)?
- Is the door width 900mm minimum?
- Is there a second door inside? If so, can this lobby be cleared by wheelchair users?
- Are door fittings at a suitable height (preferably 900mm) above the floor?
- Are there large D-shaped pull handles on both sides of door? And a lever-type door lock with external access in case of emergency?
- Is side transfer from a wheelchair possible to one or both sides of the toilet (with appropriate grabrails in place)?
- Is it possible for a wheelchair user to get the wheels into position under the washbasin (washbasin lip 800mm from floor)?
- Are taps within easy reach at basin and lever-type design?
- Are facilities at appropriate heights (e.g. soap dispenser, towel rail, hand dryer at between 800mm and 1000mm) and within reach of washbasin?
- Are any shelves at appropriate height (750mm)?
- Are coat hooks at an appropriate height (1200mm and 1700mm)?
- Are mirrors at an appropriate height (starting 600–800mm above floor and level, rising to 1600mm)?
- Is the light switch at an appropriate height (900–1200mm)?
- Is the alarm cord colour-contrasted, with a pull handle 100mm from the floor, ideally within reach of the WC bowl?
- Is there a sealed disposal bin as well as a paper towel bin?
- If provided in other WCs in the building, is there a tampon/towel machine, and at an accessible height (with controls no higher than 1200mm)?

Restaurant, café, bar areas

- Is there non-fixed seating, some of it with armrests?
- What is the table height (lower surface needs to be 650mm minimum to wheel under)?
- Are table spaces and circulation adequate for wheelchair users?
- How high is the service counter (ideally no more than 760mm), or are there staff to help?
- Are staff available to carry trays to the table?
- Are menus available in large print or Braille, or are staff available to help?

Performance spaces

Auditoria

- How many wheelchair user spaces are there?
- Are there accessible aisle seats with lift-up arms for side transfer from wheelchair?
- Can wheelchair users sit with non-disabled friends (i.e. is seating integrated)?
- Can wheelchairs be stored during the performance?
- Is there access and space for guide/assistance dogs?
- Are there acceptable sight lines?
- Is there wheelchair access from the auditorium to the refreshment/bar facilities and toilets?
- Is there access from front seating to the stage?
- Is there an induction loop or infrared system to assist hearing impaired people?
- Are there infrared headsets with an additional audio description track for visually impaired people?

Backstage

- Are the dressing rooms, showers, WCs wheelchair accessible?
- Is there one or more wheel-under dressing table?
- Are light switches, clothes rails, electrical sockets etc. within reach and at 800–1200mm high?
- Is access to the stage level or via a lift?
- Are there visual or audio cue lights/monitors?

Rehearsal rooms

- Is there wheelchair access?
- Is an induction loop fitted?
- Are there accessible dressing rooms, showers, WCs?

Control areas

- Are the lighting/sound controls accessible?
- Is there an audio description transmission area (theatre)?
- Are there audio description technical facilities (cinema)?

Exhibition/gallery space

- Is there easy access to the exhibits?
- Is there adequate space to move freely around the room?
- Is exhibition information suitably designed (e.g. point size, font) and positioned for reading from wheelchair user height? And/or is there separate information in large print?
- Is there maximum visibility for visually impaired people?
- Are display cabinets designed such that wheelchair users and short disabled people can see exhibits?

Fire and safety issues

- Is fire information in large point size and at appropriate height?
- Is there an evacuation plan that covers evacuating people with disabilities, and is there always a member of staff on duty with the relevant knowledge and skills?
- Are the elements of the plan well known, e.g. refuge areas, location of evacuation chairs (if any)?
- Is there a visual fire alarm in all areas of the building?
- Are there fire alarm break-glass units at low level, with hammers?
- Are all fire exits wheelchair accessible?

General points

Heating

- Are the switches for heating / air conditioning in offices, meeting rooms or training areas accessible?
- Can heating / air conditioning in offices, meeting rooms or training areas be regulated by users with disabilities to suit their needs?

Lighting

- Are the lighting controls (switches, blinds etc.) accessible?
- Can lighting settings be adjusted (low or bright)?
- Are there particular facilities for people with visual impairments?
- Is lighting fluorescent or other (flickering fluorescent lighting is problematic)?

Signage

- Are signposting and door-labelling large and clear?
- Are signs for toilets and lifts tactile and visible?

Audio aids

- Do meeting rooms and reception areas have built-in or portable induction loops?
- Do auditoria or 'event' spaces have induction loops or infrared equipment fitted?

Shifting perspectives...on communication

Booking methods and accessibility

Details of all booking methods the venue offers should be included in season brochures, on publicity materials and on the venue's website, along with details of the building's accessibility. Venues could also consider providing this information in alternative formats.

Alternative formats

Alternative formats are versions of printed material provided in large print or Braille, on audio CD, in plain text for email distribution, or in Plain English (see separate heading below) for people with intellectual disabilities.

Large-print versions of publicity material

Large-print documents can be produced in house as long as you have a plain-text, unformatted version of the publicity material. When preparing the material you should consider point size, typeface, and paper type, colour and weight. Guidelines drawn up by the National Council for the Blind of Ireland (NCBI) to accompany their Clear Print Mark can be downloaded from their website, www.ncbi.ie.

Large print is generally taken to mean an 18-point font size or higher. However, a large-print document for general use should be at least 14-point, as it will be accessible to many people who use low-vision aids.

One of the most important characteristics of a large-print document is a sans serif typeface/font. Helvetica, Gill Sans, Arial, Tahoma and Univers are examples of sans serif typefaces.

When preparing the material you should consider point size, typeface, paper type, colour and weight.

Keep use of italics to a minimum. Upper-case lettering is not necessary as the uniformity of 'all caps' text makes distinguishing individual letters more difficult. It is best to avoid using justified text (flush right margin) because the irregular spacing which often occurs during justification may diminish readability.

Matt paper is preferable to glossy: reflections can disturb some readers. If the document is double sided, the weight of the paper is important as print on the reverse can show through, reducing readability considerably.

Coloured print on coloured paper is difficult for some visually impaired people. A high contrast such as black on white is preferred, but black or blue on pale yellow are also acceptable combinations. If using reverse print (white or other pastels on a coloured background), select a dark background; but with reverse print, point size and typeface are also crucially important for legibility.

Running text across photographs or illustrations should be avoided.

Publicity material in Braille

While it is possible to produce Braille in house using Braille translation software and an embosser (Braille printer), the quality of the Braille produced cannot be guaranteed unless a member of staff can proofread the finished document. A more cost-effective and reliable solution is to send a plain text version of your publicity material to a Braille transcription service. They usually charge per A4 page of text and require at least a week's lead-in time. In the Republic of Ireland the largest producer is the NCBI's Library and Media Centre.

Publicity material on audio CD/file

It is possible, and relatively inexpensive, to record short documents on to audio CD in house using a digital recorder. The recording can then be edited using computer software such as Garage Band or Audacity, and burned on to audio CD or circulated in MP3 file format. For larger documents it is advisable to send a plain text version of your publicity material to a specialist recording service. They usually charge per A4 page of text and require at least a week's lead-in time. In the Republic of Ireland the largest producer is the NCBI's Library and Media Centre.

Publicity material in plain text

Some blind and visually impaired computer users find PDF documents very difficult to read and prefer MS Word plain text. These text files can either be downloaded from a website or sent as email attachments, so that the information can be transformed through the user's own software into a format they can read, e.g. large print, Braille or text-to-speech.

Plain English documents

For people with intellectual disabilities, a Plain English version of a document will be helpful. Writing in Plain English (sometimes called Easy English) means in a way that the intended audience can read and understand easily. For people with reading difficulties or intellectual disabilities, a Plain English approach involves e.g. using shorter sentences, active verb constructions where possible, and vocabulary that is appropriate for the intended reader. Plain English writing is often accompanied by illustrations (including pictograms). Well-considered layout and design features can also be used to make the meaning clear.

Further information about writing in Plain English are available from the Plain English Campaign (www.plainenglish.co.uk). This organisation also awards the Crystal Mark, which verifies that a document is written in Plain English. The Crystal Mark is now in use in 80 countries around the world.

Useful contacts

The following list of contacts was compiled with reference to the Arts and Disability Networking Pilot and the two case studies presented in this resource pack. We hope it will be of benefit to those who want further information about any of these projects or are considering similar initiatives. For a comprehensive list of arts and disability resources please consult the Arts and Disability Directory for the island of Ireland (www.artsanddisability.com).

Arts and Disability Networking Pilot

The partners

Arts Council / An Chomhairle Ealaíon

Orla Moloney, Head of Arts Participation
Monica Corcoran, Head of Local Arts
70 Merrion Square
Dublin 2
T: 01 618 0200
Callsave: 1850 392 492
F: 01 676 1302
W: www.arts council.ie

Arts and Disability Ireland

Pádraig Naughton, Director
Sean O'Casey Centre
St Marys Road North
East Wall
Dublin 3
T: 01 850 9003
E: padraig@adiarts.ie
W: www.adiarts.ie

Mayo County Council Arts Office

Anne McCarthy, Arts Officer
Damien O'Connor, Disability Arts Co-ordinator
Áras an Chontae
Castlebar
Co. Mayo
T: 094 902 4444
E: mayoarts@mayococo.ie
W: www.mayococo.ie

Disability programme contacts

The Lawnmowers Independent Theatre Company Ltd

Swinburne House
Swinburne Street
Gateshead
Tyne and Wear
NE8 1AX, England
T: +44 191 478 9200
E: info@thelawnmowers.co.uk
W: www.thelawnmowers.co.uk

The Oska Bright Film Festival

Carousel
Community Base
113 Queens Road
Brighton
BN1 3XG, England
T: +44 1273 234 734
E: oskabright@carousel.org.uk
W: www.oskabright.co.uk

Altered Images exhibition

The partners

Irish Museum of Modern Art

Johanne Mullan and Georgie Thompson,
National Programme
Royal Hospital
Military Road
Kilmainham
Dublin 8
T: 01 612 9900
F: 01 612 9999
W: www.imma.ie

South Tipperary County Council Arts Service

Sally O’Leary, Arts Officer
County Museum
Clonmel
Co. Tipperary
T: 052 613 4565
W: www.southtippcoco.ie

Mayo County Council Arts Office

Anne McCarthy, Arts Officer
Damien O’Connor, Disability Arts Co-ordinator
Áras an Chontae
Castlebar
Co. Mayo
T: 094 902 4444
E: mayoarts@mayococo.ie
W: www.mayococo.ie

Other contacts

National Council for the Blind of Ireland

Braille Production Unit
Mary Fahy
Unit 29
Finglas Business Centre
Jamestown Road
Finglas
Dublin 11
T: 01 864 2266
F: 01 864 2280
e: mary.fahy@ncbi.ie
W: www.ncbi.ie

Mind’s Eye Description Services Limited

Anne Hornsby
139 Bromwich Street
Bolton
BL2 1LJ, England
T: 0044 1204 522 481
M: 0044 7889 232 438
E: anne.hornsby@btinternet.com

Topografik

Loz Simpson
26 Chestnut Avenue
London
N8 8NY, England
M: 0044 7976 253 310
E: topografik@aol.com
W: www.topografik.co.uk

The Irish Industrial Floor Company

Ron Mathews
Mespil House
Sussex Road
Dublin 4
T: 01 231 4676
E: info@irishfloorcompany.com
W: www.irishfloorcompany.com

The Handrail Man

1 Briarly Court
Churchtown
Dublin 14
T: 01 298 1975
F: 01 298 1975
M: 087 257 6774 / 087 2938858
E: thehandrailman@eircom.net
W: www.thehandrailman.ie

Assisted performances

The partners

Arts and Disability Ireland

Pádraig Naughton, Director
Sean O'Casey Centre
St Marys Road North
East Wall
Dublin 3
T: 01 850 9003
E: padraig@adiarts.ie
W: www.adiarts.ie

Abbey Theatre / Amharclann na Mainistreach

Lisa Farrelly, Engage and Learn
26/27 Lower Abbey Street
Dublin 1
T: 01 887 2200
E: lisa.farrelly@abbeytheatre.ie
W: www.abbeytheatre.ie/
engage_and_learn/assisted_performances

Sign Language Interpreting Service

c/o Citizens Information Board
Hainault House
The Square
Tallaght
Dublin 24
T: 01 413 9670
F: 01 413 9677
M: 087 980 6996
E: bookings@slis.ie
W: www.slis.ie

Disability resource organisations

National Council for the Blind of Ireland

Whitworth Road
Drumcondra
Dublin 9
T: 01 8307033
Callsave: 1850 334 353
W: www.ncbi.ie

National Institute for Intellectual Disability

John Kubiak
Teaching and Learning Officer / Curriculum
Trinity College
College Green
Dublin 2
T: 01 896 3442
E: kubiakj@tcd.ie
W: www.tcd.ie/niid

National Learning Network

Roslyn Park
Sandymount
Dublin 4
T: 01 205 7200
F: 01 205 7211
E: info@nln.ie
W: www.nln.ie

Deafhear

35 North Frederick Street
Dublin 1
T: 01 817 5700
Minicom: 01 817 5777
F: 01 878 3629
E: info@deafhear.ie
Text messages: 01 878 3629

Arts and disability funding organisations

Arts Council of Northern Ireland

77 Malone Road
Belfast
BT9 6AQ, Northern Ireland
T: 048 9038 5200 (from Republic of Ireland landlines)
or +44 28 9038 5200
F: 048 9038 5200 (from Republic of Ireland landlines)
or +44 28 9066 1715
E: info@artscouncil-ni.org
W: www.artscouncil-ni.org

Arts & Disability Forum

Ground Floor
109–113 Royal Avenue
Belfast
BT1 1FF, Northern Ireland
T: 048 9023 9450 (from Republic of Ireland landlines)
or +44 28 9023 9450
Textphone: 048 9032 5744 (from Republic of Ireland landlines)
or +44 28 9032 5744
F: 048 9024 7770 (from Republic of Ireland landlines)
or +44 28 9024 7770
E: info@adf.ie
W: www.adf.ie

Acknowledgements

We would like to acknowledge the commitment and support given to the projects by participating artists, venues, organisations, institutions and local authorities.

The **Shift in Perspective** partners

Arts & Disability Ireland / Na hEalaíona agus Míchumas in Éirinn

Pádraig Naughton, Director / Stiúrthóir

Abbey Theatre / Amharclann na Mainistreach

Lisa Farrelly, Engage and Learn Coordinator / Comhordaitheoir
Glac Páirt agus Foghlaim

Arts Council / An Chomhairle Ealaíon

Monica Corcoran, Head of Local Arts / Ceann na nEalaíon Áitiúil
Orla Moloney, Head of Arts Participation / Ceann an
Rannpháirteachais sna hEalaíona

Irish Museum of Modern Art / Áras Nua-Ealaíne na hÉireann

Johanne Mullan, National Programmer / Réiteoir na gClár Náisiúnta
Georgie Thompson, Assistant Curator / Coimeádaí Cúnta, Bailiúcháin

Mayo County Council / Comhairle Contae Mhaigh Eo

Anne McCarthy, Arts Officer / Oifigeach Ealaíon
Damien O'Connor, Disability Arts Coordinator /
Oifigeach Ealaíona Míchumais

South Tipperary County Council / Comhairle Contae Thiobraid Árann Theas

Sally O'Leary, Arts Officer / Oifigeach Ealaíon