

Consulting Group on Disability- Research data document pack

This document pack contains summaries and reflections treated as data for the Consulting Groups project (2022). The Consulting Groups project was part of UKRI-funded Future Leaders Fellowship (FLF) project Access Folk and developed by the FLF lead Prof. Fay Hield and Dr Esbjorn Wettermark at the University of Sheffield with project management from Dr Helen Grindley. This themed document pack is one of several related to the Consulting Groups project, all of which can be viewed and downloaded from The University of Sheffield's Online Research Data repository (ORDA).

Contents

Page 2 : 'Issues relating to Disability in Folk music' by Oliver Cross and Consulting Group on Disability

Page 8: 'Reflections and Notes on CG on Disability analysis' by Esbjörn Wettermark and Consulting Group on Disability

Page 10: 'Quick scan analysis of the Disability group' by Fay Hield

To cite this document

Cross, Oliver, Wettermark, Esbjörn, Hield, Fay and Consulting Group on Disability. 2022. *Consulting Group on Disability - Research data document pack*. Access Folk, University of Sheffield, UK

For individual section please refer to individual document titles and page numbers, e.g.:

Cross, Oliver and Consulting Group on Disability. 2022. 'Issues relating to Disability in Folk music' in *Consulting Group on Disability - Research data document pack*. Access Folk, University of Sheffield, UK. pp. 2-7

Issues relating to Disability in Folk music

Language is important. In this document I have used identity first language. This is to say, I use 'disabled people', 'neurodivergent person', 'D/deaf person' and 'profoundly disabled person' and 'Blind person' or 'visually impaired person', as descriptors used in the article. For reference, 'neurodivergent person' commonly refers to conditions such as ADHD, Autism, Dyslexia and Dyspraxia. 'D/deaf person' with a capital 'D' is used to denote those people who have been deaf from birth or before they started to learn to talk, with 'deaf' with a small 'd', indicating all other categories of acquired deafness.

Access at venues and events

- Function rooms in older pubs are often above the main bar and few have lifts which means that they are inaccessible for anyone who have access needs regarding mobility.
- General lack of awareness of reasonable adjustments.
- Lack of thought about seating, for example fields can be difficult to access. Some people may need to sit, or sit leaning on a wall.
- Lack of accessible toilets in venues.
- Lack of awareness of how to use PA systems to help D/deaf people. • Some people need a PA to access a folk group. PAs should routinely be admitted for free.
- Transport to venues, parking as well as public transport.
- If a venue has access information displayed prominently on a website, notice board, otherwise in advance, this removes emotional load from the disabled person interacting with a venue.
- Disabled viewing areas at events must be budgeted for in the funding arrangements. Some people will prefer to sit in a separate space and some people will prefer to be in the main area. Both are valid.

Reception at venues and events

- It is necessary for venues to put resources into disability awareness and customer care training, such as that which is offered by Attitude is Everything and other disability and disabled-led arts organisations.
- It is important to interact appropriately with disabled customers, regardless as to whether their disability is visible or invisible so as to enable access for audience and performers.
- Ensure disabled visitors feel included by going through arrangements in advance, sorting out appropriate seating/chair location, talking with people not about them.

Preparing to attend a venue or event

- The first point of contact for people coming to an event for the first time is often a website. Make websites accessible with visible information about access policies, and positive disability awareness.

- Organisers should always be in a position to offer access information in advance of an event.
- Ensure directions and transport information to and from the venue is accurate and visible on the website, to ensure ease of locating venue, and safe ways of getting home afterwards.
- More free carer tickets are needed and disabled people should not be forced to disclose their disability to be able get accommodations.

Attitudes and conduct in the folk world and among arrangers

- Access makes economic sense. Disabled people spend money on Folk music too.
- Long established folk venues can be extremely resistant to any change, particularly those tending to be run by older volunteers who may be entrenched in their views.
- Cultural resistance to the use of microphones, printed sheet music, or music stands can be a bar to participation.
- There can be resistance or intolerance to accessible or adaptive instruments in favour of 'authenticity' or 'tradition' without taking into account the needs of disabled musicians.
- Sign-up sheets can be a bar to neurodivergent people participating at folk clubs.
- If a person says they have access needs because they are disabled, accept that and ask what they are, do not ask them about their disability. It is not your business.
- Organisers sometimes confuse the cosiness of a relationship they have with a venue, with good access. These are not the same thing.
- Some folk venues are very insular and not good at welcoming new people, especially those with access needs they may have never encountered before.
- Don't overhelp. Ask what kind of help a disabled person would like.

Support and new developments

- Live streaming – now more prevalent and accepted.
- Stay Up Late <https://stayupdate.org/> is a charity for those with disabilities who need gig buddies to be able to attend live performance events.
- Venues and professionals such as agents and organisers should link to organisations such as 'EFDSS' <https://www.efdss.org/> or 'Attitude is Everything' <http://www.attitudeiseverything.org.uk/> for access training to ensure good practice to make events and workshops within events accessible
- Emmie Ward, Lead Tutor at EFDSS has a lot of experience of working in access for profoundly disabled people.
- Promote more disabled people employed at events and in leadership roles, and ensure their access requirements are met.
- Some venues, such as EFDSS have worked hard on access, such as in their inclusive Folk project, to ensure that people who have high care needs can participate.
- EFDSS, Drake Music, <https://www.drakemusic.org/> DADAFest, <https://www.dadafest.co.uk/> Sound and Music, <https://soundandmusic.org/> and The Barbican Centre <https://www.barbican.org.uk/> have good practice in working with

disabled musicians and artists.

- The Social Model of Disability training is available at Drake Music
<https://www.drakemusic.org/blog/nim-ralph/understanding-disability-part-5-the-social-model/>
- EFDSS has a resource with graphics of Makaton signs included
<https://www.efdss.org/learning/resources/resources-listing/55-resources/learning-resources/4894-songs-of-rural-life>
- Have named and trained access workers who are available to discuss access needs of people using a venue.
- LILAC network <https://m.facebook.com/thelilacnetwork/> - Leeds based LGBTQ arts collective is entirely run by experienced disabled musicians with the aim of giving accessible advice to musicians.
- Disability Equality and Customer Care Training delivered by Attitude is Everything <http://www.attitudeiseverything.org.uk/> is based on the social model of disability.
- 'Changing Places' run mobile fully accessible toilets for events
- 'The Goose is Out' is a small London-based organisation that provides information about preparing for events.

Access specific to D/deaf people

- Make greetings, instructions, and welcomes to events accessible.
- D/deaf people who have been deaf all their lives are pre-lingually deaf and tend to communicate in sign language as their first language. Lip reading, captions or amplified English is a second language, so signed performances are also very important.
- Integrate amplification, hearing loops, captions, BSL interpretation, Makaton signs in sessions and performances.
- Organisers must check that the hearing loop is actually on/working.
- Ensure that speakers/performers comply with using the microphone and know how to use the equipment.

Access specific to neurodivergent people

- Some folk clubs can be extremely fixed about how they do things, such as having own seats and unwritten rules which can be a bar to participation. Stop that.
- Give as much information as possible in advance of events to make it possible for neurodivergent people to plan a schedule and attend.
- Be specific about how many steps are there up to/in the venue, the timetable, how many floor spots, how do you get chosen to play/sing and for how long?
- For gigging neurodivergent folk artists, ensure they have enough **advance** relevant information around length of performance, when they will play, equipment needed, any contract, what they will be paid, method of payment, access needs, accommodation, transport.
- Use venues with lots of space so that neurodivergent people can choose how they interact with drinking culture, noise, proximity of others.

Access specific to profoundly disabled people

- Profoundly disabled people can sometimes access mainstream events with good access measures in place.
- Folk song and verbally based activities tend to be the easiest for profoundly disabled people to attend, and folk dance based activities are the hardest for those with severe disabilities to access.
- Some people will need or prefer a specific space for people who have profound disabilities and it is important to create appropriate, well-resourced spaces that aren't patronising.
- Spectating events is the easiest to accommodate, then dances and singing are perhaps the hardest of all.

Folk song and repertoire

- Representation of disability in folk songs is lacking, particularly in traditional folk songs.
- Representations that do exist are always about visible disabilities, such as blindness, or limb difference.
- Representations are nearly always derogatory, and use offensive archaic terminology and language to describe disability.
- People in this group studying folk music at degree or PhD level have found very little disabled representation.
- Songs about changelings could in modern terms be construed to be about neurodivergent people. The 'Changeling's Lullaby' could be reclaimed by the community, for example.
- There is potential for other invisible disabilities being present in the folklore around changelings, witches etc. It would be good to find out if any research is happening in that field.
- The Queer Folk project could be a model for such research, especially in terms of re writing or reinterpreting old songs.
- Beggars in songs were often disabled, as in 'The Blind Beggar of...'; for example. • There are references to disabled people who worked as musicians because their disabilities rendered them incapable of doing other jobs, across multiple folk traditions.

Getting gigs and jobs

- Networking can be challenging for emerging disabled folk artists.
- Disabled performers can feel there are unwritten rules to getting work, such as who to talk to?
- Negotiating payment can be difficult, in a world where musicians are often expected

to play for nothing.

- Could a formal open application process help? This would need to be accessible and would vary a lot based on individual and disability.
- Job application packs are usually available in Word or PDF and forms can look complicated to some disabled people. EasyRead and BSL. Formats are expensive, but it is still possible to make reasonable adjustments that are inexpensive. A voice recording or video of a personal statement or cover letter can be more accessible.

Reflection

It is clear that people working in the music industry need access training in at least the Social Model of Disability if not the more intersectional Radical Model. This really is the basic first step to understanding access.

Access is not just about toilets and car parks and directions to venues on websites. Access is a fundamental right. There is often a lack of understanding about the fact that disabled audiences and performers alike require good Access and that this is different depending on what you are doing in a Folk club. I have met with surprise that as a disabled person, I can be a performer who wishes to perform at events, get work and be paid. There needs to be a cultural shift in the expectation that disabled people are also performers as well as audience members.

I also have met with the opinion that because an access need only affected me, being fundamentally different from what everyone else needed, then that is a justifiable reason for my access needs to be disregarded in favour of the needs of the majority (who were non-disabled people who wanted a particular underground bar at the bottom of 30 slippery steps for a venue for a group event that was supposed to have included me).

In a world where the government has eroded disability rights, and benefits and lives have been lost, it is hardly surprising that there is a lack of information, even amongst disabled people on what the equality legislation actually means in terms of access.

I believe that it is going to be very difficult for us as a movement to encourage people involved in the running of voluntary groups to become up to date in these matters.

However, I believe that those working professionally in organising Folk events must work to an Industry standard regarding Access, that has regard to The Social Model of Disability and the Equality Act 2010 and this must not be an optional choice.

As a group, our discussions did not include Blind and visually impaired people and their access with regard to Folk music. The great irony of this is that when we do talk about Blind people in the Consulting Group summary notes, our references are in the context of a Blind beggar, a Blind fiddler and a modern day blind folk performer! We must do better and think about everybody.

We have only talked about the problems with Access but we haven't talked at all yet about the opportunities for individuals and Folk groups and the Folk movement as a whole. The

communal and egalitarian nature of Folk singing sessions where everyone joins in is inherently suited to accessibility. Singing in this way brings social and health benefits for everybody including disabled people. This is equally true for other disabled musicians where being part of an ensemble reliant on music notation excludes them. Generally speaking this involves Blind and other categories of disabled musicians (including me). I have worked extensively with disabled artists and accessible music groups. Accessible does not mean Alien or low quality.

I believe there is something to be said about the representation of disabled people in folk song and folklore itself. In traditional music there is a tendency for only visible disabilities to be represented - often suffixed with the word 'beggar'. We now know more about invisible disabilities, and that these have manifested in Folklore as changelings, witches, and other non-conforming groups or supernatural beings. I am interested to know if there is anyone doing this kind of research, as I am interested in it myself.

Oliver Cross

17th July 2022

Reflections and Notes on CG on Disability analysis , 18 July 2022

Overall agreement on Oliver Cross's analysis, below are a few notes from the discussions had after reading the analysis.

- Self employment/freelance work can be good for disabled people as it is flexible, however all arts organisations that advertise opportunities for artists need to be accessible for a variety of artists. Currently many disabled artists are finding that they are mostly working with dedicated disability arts organisations, it shouldn't have to be like that.
- We noted the need for training but also discussed what is actually realistic for a small venue with regards to training, especially if they are volunteer led. It is not just about telling people that they have to do something, they need to want to do it.
- Regarding issues of mental health, there are quite a few artists who write songs on this subject, even though we didn't discuss MH in that much detail in our meetings.
- We talked about tickets for access workers/support. This seems to be an issue for many but one understanding was that there should already be legal provisions for someone to bring a support worker with them to events without charge. It might be that this is not widely known or that there are "loopholes" or some vagueness in how this is defined.
- Cat McGill, highlighted that there is no register of disabled people, no one is disabled "enough", "registered disabled" (a term you sometimes come across) is not a thing.
- Cat also noted that venues and organisations can be a bit put off by trying to accommodate everything because in the end it is impossible. And if they can't do it, they won't do it. Variety in programming and information is key! Tell people in detail what they can expect with regards to accessibility and they will be able to make their own decisions and schedule events that are working for different people.
- Lack of information is a huge accessibility issue.

Esbjorn's reflections on the group's discussions and notes

Looking through the notes from our three previous meetings I am impressed by how thorough the group has been. I think this is reflecting the amount of personal experience and passion for improving access that exists within the group. Disability was always going to be a big and diverse subject to scope in a few meetings and there are a few areas we did not discuss in as much detail, in particular the intersection between old age and disability; mental health; learning disabilities (including severe and profound); and the access needs of blind and visually impaired people. Access Folk might need to consult a bit further within these areas.

When it comes to measures that could potentially have a wider impact for disabled people regardless of specific needs, increasing knowledge about the Social Model for Disability came up in several meetings as well as understanding reasonable adjustments for access. Also, finding ways of reaching and working with smaller volunteer led venues, is important although potentially harder than larger venues.

It is also notable that there are already a lot of good examples of organisations and individuals working to make a change in both the folk scene and the wider music scene. Drake Music, Attitude is Everything and EFDSS were mentioned repeatedly.

Fay's quick scan analysis of the Disability group

Key points

Accessible instruments - microphones/electronic devices/music stands and lyrics not always welcomed at folk events.

Disabilities can affect instrument/genre choice (loud instruments for d/deaf people; loop pedals over band for autistic people)

There could be a lot of benefit to the folk scene if venues and organisers(in particular) were more aware of the Social Model of Disability. Due to the intersectional nature of disability, reasonable adjustments could have a strong knock on effect leading to positive changes for people who don't identify as disabled as well.

Aging organisers and core participants may mean an increase of disability and more inclusive actions being taken. Not yet seen, most awareness seems to be with younger people. Age related limitations are not always recognised as a disability.

Potential for funding for disability issues - venue alterations / artistic output/activities specifically for disabled people.

Activities specifically for disabled people tend to be closed group rather than open to the wider disabled community, less celebratory/community forming. Other disabled people want to participate in mainstream events. Room, and need, for all kind of activity.

Having disabled role models on stage/organising events/calling dances is positive.

Well being and mental health issues are a disability, not covered very deeply, but many instances of community support having a positive impact. Many artists have mental health issues, and music is well recognised as being a self regulating therapeutic device.

Inaccessible venues - many clubs are in upstairs rooms/pub with no disabled facilities. Festivals in fields can be difficult. Organisers value the cosiness/traditional feel of the venue over the accessibility factor.

Live streaming is making live music more accessible for people who can't attend in person.

Potential for greater engagement with mainstream orgs like 'stay up late', 'gig buddies' and 'attitude is everything'.

Many organisers unaware of the reasonable adjustments they could (and should?) be making.
Lack of staff/volunteers with specific training - a lot based on dated public perception and stereotypes of disability.

Various things are difficult for neurodivergent people to navigate - Sign up sheets to sing, or knowing when to join, or where to sit in a singaround can be difficult, for professional performers the general low level of administrative efficiency can be stressful (not getting info in good time/useful format).

PA make it more expensive to attend

Accessible websites as well as venues - folk sites often dated software/run by non professional web designers.

Sharing accessibility info on websites useful - Goose is Out example of good practice.

Social model of disability should place the burden of adaptation/information sharing on organisers rather than disabled participants. We should normalise asking for everyone's access needs. This can cause additional costs and time, but these should be factored in.

There is an attitude that the folk scene is welcoming and that accessibility is fine - causes a reluctance to address the issues.

Potential for voluntary folk workforce to attend training.

Use of microphones is useful for linking to hearing lops. But in the folk world, a lot of people prefer to sing unamplified - not recognising the needs of d/Deaf listeners.

For people with profound disabilities, spectating events are the easiest to accommodate, then dances, singing perhaps hardest of all.

Disability representation in repertoire low. Where it happens is often derogatory and not often from the perspective of the disabled person. Language of disability changed over time - alterations may need to be made to make materials acceptable.

Disability apparent in folklore - making sense of disability rather than discussed openly in changeling stories.

Little academic research, or inclusion in research discussions, of this area.

Issues/reflections

A lot of very focused information and ideas were shared in this group clearly by people with specific experience. At times it veered into discussing generic disability issues rather than how those specifically relate to folk singing, so in this analysis I have tried to draw out those elements as far as possible.