



Salford Creative Health Network

Notes from meeting Friday 5 Sept 2025, Lady James' Hall, Irlam

Theme: how accessible and inclusive is Creative Health in Salford?

Welcome

- Caroline thanked everyone for an amazing turnout. Thanks to Diane and Frances from Lady James' Hall in Irlam for their support in hosting the event. Attendees joining online were also welcomed (with apologies for any IT issues as this is the first hybrid meeting with Teams running from a hotspot).
- Today's meeting & agenda has been programmed with the direction of the new Creative Health Steering Group – Janet Charlesworth, Dennis Baldwin, Maggie Lister & Yolande Ghola. Access & inclusion came up straight away for the Steering Group as a key barrier for creativity in Salford. Today's meeting is a chance to discuss this.
- It's easy to talk about creativity being good for people – but lots of people feel excluded and/or nervous about being creative, or being in a cultural venue. For lots of reasons they might feel these spaces or activities aren't open to them, or don't represent them. Today we begin with some projects that are about arts access and inclusion in Salford & GM.

Insights into recent projects:

Uncurbed Collective

- Janet and Jenny shared their new film 'We Claim the Hall'
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BBIs0h8RsEA>
- This project was a Salford Cultural Strategy Commission produced with DIY Theatre Company in collaboration with Company Chameleon and Manchester Lights Media.
- Janet and Jenny's key observation was that access is a very personal issue and means different things to different people. They hoped that the question: 'what does access mean to you?' will be covered today.

MYRIAD

- Estee showcased **Myriad: A Global Majority Spotlight on Creative Health** commissioned by NHS GM and delivered with Afrocats and Company Chameleon between 2023-25. They are hoping for funding to support Myriad 2.0 in the future. This project sits within the GM Live Well programme. <https://gmintegratedcare.org.uk/livewell/>
- Myriad's aim is to support a more diverse creative health workforce in GM through:
 - Practitioner support – including SPARK training programme.
 - Community test & learn projects: 5 in total – see here:
<https://myriadproject.co.uk/community-based-test-learn-projects/>
 - Core competency frameworks for practitioners on subjects such as cultural understanding, facilitation, collaboration, project management, monitoring and evaluation, employment and self-care.

- There are loads of resources on the Myriad website – including the frameworks, case studies and more: <https://myriadproject.co.uk/>

SICK! Festival

- Although outside of Salford, SICK! Festival based in north Manchester were invited by the Steering Group as an organisation that brings health and creativity together – with lived experience at the heart of their work.
- Paul Cocker joined us to share SICK's work. He noted that the organisation was founded by someone who had experience of feeling outside the arts world as a result of their health challenges.
- Based in north Manchester – mainly Moston, Harpurhey and Charlestown – SICK! includes both a festival and a social prescribing programmes (SMASH) based at No. 93 Wellbeing Centre. <https://sickfestival.com/commission/smash/>
- SICK! have found that sessions where an artist is brought in as an 'expert/professional' can feel a bit intimidating to participants. But when the artist has lived experience of a health challenge – in common with the participants – that it can be really transformative and levelling. With everyone feeling on the same page and connected.

Sharing experiences:

- A central part of today's meeting – as requested by the Steering Group – was the opportunity for local people with lived experience of feeling marginalised in relation to arts & health (for a variety of often very different reasons) to share their experiences. Caroline thanked the invited speakers who had kindly agreed to contribute today.
- Caroline stressed that today isn't the only chance for people to contribute their thoughts & experiences. Not everyone could make today's meeting – e.g. a group representing young people living with neurodiversity couldn't attend today. Caroline is going to follow up separately with this group (and others) and will share notes.
- It's difficult to know how to approach the subject of representing a range of voices/experiences of people who might feel excluded the arts. You don't want to have a 'tick box' approach – but equally it's hard to know how to address access & inclusion issues without thinking about how to represent a range of different groups. Feedback on our approach is always welcomed.

Viv Ormrod from Salford Parent/Carer Forum – <https://salfordpcf.com/>

- Families with a child or young person with special education needs and/or disabilities can often feel incredibly isolated. Maybe you've been to a session that you think is okay for your child but you have been asked to leave. You can be very anxious about attending things & knowing if you'll be welcome. The Salford Parent/Carer Forum is essential for local families to feel connected and support each other.
- If you are an arts venue – it is essential you have social stories *and that you share these regularly* – so that people know what to expect/what your venue is like. Do this often: it really helps families know that they are welcome.
- Don't just say an event is 'accessible' – say how. Send all the info to the participant beforehand. Be specific. There are loads of practical issues to think about – is there a quiet room somewhere a child/young person could go if they need a bit of time for themselves? Don't organise events for 9/10am – as it's really hard for some families to get out the door.
- Being creative is so powerful for SEND families/children & young people – it's such a crucial outlet and somewhere they can really connect with themselves and each other.

- Talk to us if you are wanting to programme something. Co-production is essential. If an organisation/service really wants to make sure it is accessible and meeting the needs of families – co-produce it WITH families. In terms of SEND, Salford PCF are open to working on projects, can be contacted on info@salfordpcf.com. More resources are coming soon to our website.

Andy Higgins from Salford Disability Forum – <https://salforddisabilityforum.com/>

- This group represents both adults and young people. Always happy to connect with different groups/organisations in Salford.
- Events that are regular – that are slow burners – are ideal. As it can become part of someone's routine. For one-off events, that might only be an hour, you might question if it is worth it.
- Organisations need to be really active in sharing that they have relaxed, BSL or audio performances or activities and/or touch tours or described events. You really need to sing about it if you do it – so that we all know. And do this regularly.
- If you are a creative place and you have thought about making your venue accessible to people with a disability – make it really prominent. Share the info often. Don't hide info on your website somewhere.
- That said, if you do something which you say is 'accessible': make sure that it is as you've described in physical/practical terms and, just as importantly, make sure your staff are trained to welcome this audience and adapt to their needs.
- Another important issue is making sure your comms are inclusive. E.g. if it is an event/resource for people who live with a visual or hearing impairment – are you advertising/promoting this in a way that is accessible to this audience?
- Final plea – be curious, ask questions – Salford Disability Forum is here to connect with organisations/groups/people in Salford to give advice, discuss training and ultimately put lived experience at the heart of what we all do. Please get in touch to chat admin@salforddisabilityforum.com.

Terri Balon from the Royal National Institute of the Blind (RNIB) –

<https://www.rnib.org.uk/campaign-with-us/support-a-campaign/campaign-resources/contact-the-campaigns-team-in-your-area/> m

- Terri talked particularly about visual arts spaces such as museums – which are often by their nature places where people living with sight impairment can feel excluded/at a loss.
- There is a common misconception that people living with sight loss are totally blind – but it can cover a range of sight impairments and most people can see some things.
- Terri showed a range of tactile resources which she has worked on with museums – including tactile drawings. [Terri has shared a wide range of resources with the Network – see the attached document 'Notes from Terri Balon' for more information.]
- She noted that videos are often seen as a way of making an activity/subject more accessible – BUT if it isn't audio described then it isn't inaccessible to people with sight loss.
- When talking about 'accessibility' venues/providers need to be very specific and think about a range of needs.
- Also think about collaborating with artists who have visual impairment – working with creative people with lived experience is very powerful.

Yolande Gholia from Salford Community Upskilling – <https://communityupskilling.org/>

- Yolande's organisation supports refugee, asylum seekers and migrants to Salford.
- She talked about how language is the biggest barrier for people newly arrived in Salford.
- People can't connect to things when they don't know what is happening. Yolande herself has lived in Salford for many years but only learnt about key events such as We Invented the Weekend through her role as a Salford Councillor. It is great to be able to share these events with her networks – but she previously had no idea this was happening.
- One of the biggest issues for people is feeling isolated. We need to find points of connection where people who have just moved to the city (who don't speak the language) can start to find out what is happening in their area – and feel welcome to attend.
- There are many different cultures in Salford – we all need to feel represented.
- An important part of creativity is the chance to learn new skills – this can really help to improve a person's wellbeing and confidence if they get a chance to try something new.
- A key barrier is travel & costs.

Leigh Matts from Princes Park Gardens – <https://www.princesparkgardencentre.com/>

- The Garden Centre supports adults with learning difficulties with employment and training. They offer a number of courses and they also offer creative sessions – which are incredibly popular.
- Many members go to creative sessions at local the GP practice. [This medical centres finds that doing creativity activities in the practice helps this audience feel less nervous about attending medical appointments.]
- Activities need to be adapted for this audience – if you use very high/formal style of language it can be very hard for them to engage. Many don't read or write. Info needs to be visual.
- How creative people are depends on their support network outside the Garden Centre – if they have families/carers who will help them attend things. This can be hard if they live in a home.

Mali Pocsai and Joy representing the Salford Dementia Forum

- Joy is an Associate with Salford University's Institute for Dementia & Ageing.
- A major issue is how people feel when they go somewhere/attend something. Do they feel welcomed. What is the environment like? Do they feel valued?
- The Associates are always keen to connect and contribute their knowledge to the development of projects/activities.

Sarah Whitehead from the Culture Club

- Sarah has worked on a wide range of creative projects with organisations such as Salford Loaves and Fishes and the Lowry. She has also worked on the Salford Poverty Truth Commission. Attending today with members of the Culture Club.
- The group talked about how dealing with a challenge in life can leave you feeling isolated but being creative has the power to help people feel connected, more confident, and able to express themselves.
- Many people dealing with a challenge such as economic hardship lack confidence – and creativity actually has a key role to play in improving people's confidence when done well and in an inclusive & welcoming way.

Summary:

- The common theme which united all the speakers was the feeling of isolation that many people experience. How do arts venues/providers talk *not* just what they offer (their programme/exhibition/show/activity) but also about their welcome?
- Equally, arts venues/groups/providers need to be very specific around access. Saying something is 'accessible' isn't enough – you need to be clear about what this means. You need to share this info regularly. And you need to collaborate and co-produce this offer/activity where possible. Do things WITH communities not for them. The more activities with lived experience at the centre the better.

Group discussion:

See separate document outlining shared feedback from group discussion around the following 4 questions:

1. Who are the key groups (with access needs or who aren't usually represented in arts/culture) to talk with / represent in any action plan?
2. What are the top issues limiting access in Salford?
3. What changes do we need to make? How to measure / set outcomes?
4. Who is missing from today's conversation – who do we still need to connect with?

The top message from the group discussions can be summarised as follows:

- People not knowing what's on. There's a lack of regular/inclusive comms – are we sharing information/stories in the right languages/formats? Are we sharing info regularly?
- People not always feeling welcome. Venues need to let people know what to expect, review if they are meeting people's needs, improve staff training & co-produce more.

Closing remarks:

- Cllr Hannah Robsinon-Smith thanked everyone for attending today – great to see such a good mix of people in the room. Especially as the area Hannah represents as Councillor and lives herself – wonderful to be in Lady James' Hall. Thank you to all the groups and people sharing their experiences today and being so honest and open. Great to discuss together the access and inclusion issues for arts and health here together today. So important to come together to think about how we as a community ensure creativity is accessible to everyone in Salford.
- Caroline noted that transport often comes up as a consistent barrier to creativity in Salford. This has also been raised by the Steering Group as a key issue in Salford. The next Network meeting will be in December in Eccles on Creative Health and its links to travel, transport & movement. Representatives from TFGM are due to attend (although changes to bus and tram routes might be outside remit of the meeting!). There are lots of local projects that use creativity to tackle travel or transport anxiety, or that reflect the close links between creativity and physical activity. Members of the Move More Salford Network will be invited to the meeting.

Next meeting: the first fortnight of December (date tbc) in Eccles – probably the Town Hall.