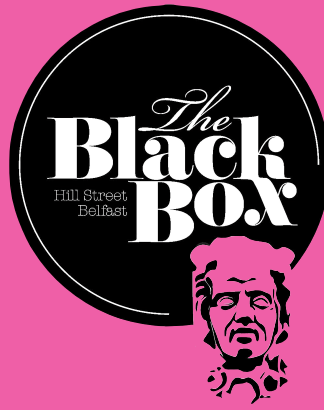




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A GUIDE TO IMPROVING ACCESS FOR PEOPLE WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES AND/OR AUTISM

"WE WANT TO STAY UP LATE,
WE WANT TO HAVE SOME
FUN!"

HELLO THERE!

We are Gig Buddies Belfast, a Black Box Project funded by the Belfast City Council. The idea behind Gig Buddies is to enable people with learning disabilities and/or autism to enjoy all the great things going on in their community, especially live gigs. The project aims to empower adults with learning disabilities and/or autism to lead on how they want to socialise by pairing them with volunteers who share common interests so that they can attend gigs together...whatever their gig may be!

As a Black Box Project, we understand what is required from the perspective of both an arts organisation and as a venue to ensure accessibility for all our patrons. Thus, we want to connect with other venues and arts organisations to make excellent accessibility for people with learning disabilities and/or autism the norm within Belfast's cultural scene. Co-operation between our Gig Buddies, the wider social care community, and local venues will ensure a continuous awareness of the adjustments we can make to help everyone feel comfortable and welcome to participate in all the amazing events on offer in Belfast!

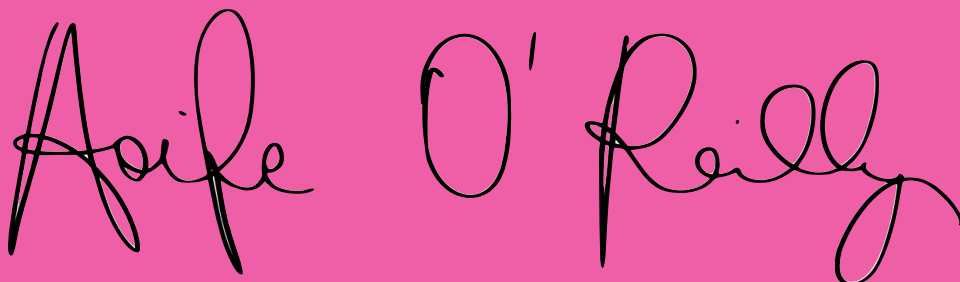
Reading this guide is a great first step in ensuring accessibility for those who require a little bit of additional support and will contribute to making Belfast an increasingly welcoming city, supportive of active citizenship! And most importantly, you'll be supporting:

"People just going out, having fun, and doing what everyone else takes for granted!"
- Paul Richards, CEO Stay Up Late

31% OF ADULTS WITH A LEARNING
DISABILITY FEEL THERE AREN'T
ANY ACCESSIBLE EVENTS FOR THEM

**statistic taken from Mencap's "Going Out and Nightlife
Survey" 2019*

We can take simple steps to improve accessibility at events and reduce the barriers that prevent people from actively engaging with culture and the local scene here in Belfast. By actively addressing our duty as venues and/or arts organisations to meet the hidden access requirements of some of our patrons, we acknowledge a commitment to social inclusion and diversity. Improved accessibility is not only beneficial for people with learning disabilities and/or autism, who are supported to attend events through these considerations, but it reinforces an atmosphere of inclusion and integration in your space, thus expanding audience engagement and community outreach!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Aoife O'Reilly". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Aoife O'Reilly
Gig Buddies Belfast - Project Coordinator
gigbuddies@blackboxbelfast.com

THE LEGAL MATTER



We are not just simply suggesting for venues and events to consider their accessibility — it is also the law. The **Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA) as amended in Northern Ireland** states that discrimination occurs when “there is a failure to make a reasonable adjustment for a disabled person”. Any establishment providing a public service or function has a duty to ensure “**reasonable adjustments**” are made to allow people with disabilities and/or autism to access live events.

WHAT ARE REASONABLE ADJUSTMENTS?

Reasonable adjustments are **physical, environmental, policy or other changes that prevent or reduce the barriers faced by people with disabilities**. Various factors influence whether a particular adjustment is considered reasonable. The test of what is reasonable is ultimately objective and not simply a matter of what you may personally think is reasonable.

The size and nature of your organisation and the type of service you provide will determine what is considered to be a “reasonable adjustment”. “Reasonable adjustments” for a large organisation may be very different to what would be considered “reasonable” for a small independent venue. Therefore, what is practical for your organisation will be considered and you will not be expected to make changes that are beyond your means. Luckily, many of the adjustments you can make to improve access and inclusion are reasonably inexpensive.

HOW TO BECOME MORE ACCESSIBLE

- ✓ Providing appropriate disability equity training for staff working with the public.
- ✓ Making changes to equipment such as installing induction loops for people with hearing impairment and providing literature in alternative text sizes for people with visual impairment.
- ✓ Recognising initiatives such as the JAM Cards and Sunflower Lanyards for people with unseen disabilities.

Advice on how to make reasonable adjustments within your organisation is available from the **Equality Commission for Northern Ireland** and can be accessed at:

www.equalityni.org/Employers-Service-Providers/Service-Providers/



R-E-S-P-E-C-T, FIND OUT WHAT IT MEANS TO ME!

Improving accessibility is about more than just ensuring physical accessibility.

YOUR ATTITUDE IS EVERYTHING!

Creating a **welcoming environment** by demonstrating kindness, patience, and respect can be a major sign of support to a person with a learning disability and/or autism. There are simple things to be aware of when interacting with a customer with learning disabilities and/or autism that can make them feel empowered and understood.

- ✓ **Speak directly** to the person you're speaking about. **Don't exclude** a person with learning disabilities and/or autism from a conversation about them by only engaging with the person accompanying them.
- ✓ Hand any **change back to the person who gave you the money** in the first place. By handing change back to a PA instead of the person, you are assuming they are not capable of being **financially independent** which is exclusionary and does not align with the spirit of accessibility.
- ✓ **Let people speak** without trying to finish their sentences. Speech issues like stammering might cause people to take longer to say what they want — it is important to be respectful and know that they are **entitled to voice their opinions without interruption**.

"AT THE MOMENT,
INFORMATION ON
WEBSITES IS TERRIBLE.
THE MAJORITY OF
SITES HAVE ONE OR
TWO LINES SAYING
THEY ARE ACCESSIBLE.
NOT WHO THEY ARE
ACCESSIBLE TO."

— Dermot Devlin, a wheelchair user who runs My Way Access, regarding the Detail Data Accessibility Survey In Northern Ireland (2016)



HONESTY IS THE BEST POLICY

We would always encourage you to be honest about what people should expect when they attend your venue or event. If your venue has access limitations, it's important to highlight that to your potential patrons so they can plan their night out accordingly. If someone isn't able to access your venue for any reason, it's better for them to find out when they are buying tickets on your website in advance, rather than when they turn up on the night.

FAQs and how you can respond:

Is there step-free access to the performance space?

If there is, all you need to say is "Step Free" or if not, explain the situation i.e. "The gig is upstairs but there is no lift".

Can people have a seated view of the stage?

In this case, it's good practice to share with the enquirer about the room set-up. You can work with the gig-goer to either reserve a space for them in advance or if chairs can't be set out, plan with them how they can get a seat if required on the night. Let the gig-goer know in advance what to do if they require a seat and communicate with your staff team so they also know how the system works.

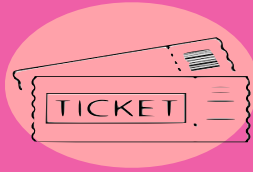
Is there an accessible toilet?

If no, let people know that an accessible toilet is not available but provide details of where the nearest one is and let people know this in advance. Get in touch with the people who run the space it's part of, explain the situation and ask if they'll open it up to your audiences.

STEPS TO SUCCESS



Including a **Venue Accessibility page** on your **website** helps people find the accessibility information they need when they are booking their tickets.



Including Accessibility Information in the **Ticket Confirmation email** can be a great reminder to people, especially in the few days before the event.



Venue staff should be confident when answering questions about access. **Including signs** around your venue that indicate access support techniques such as hearing induction loops are also helpful.

How to make communication accessible:

- ✓ **Highlighting the key points** in short passages of information makes it clear to read and understand.
- ✓ Using **san serif** fonts in a **large font size** can be really helpful for easy-reading. **Arial** and **Helvetica** are great examples of this!
- ✓ Include a **mixture of text and images** — making information visual allows more people to understand your communications. **Audio/video communications** are even more accessible and are really appreciated, if they're within your means to create!
- ✓ It's **best not to overlay images with text**, keep text simple and clear.
- ✓ There should be a **high contrast** between the text and the background. Black text on a white background is clear to read but colour is good too, as long as it reads clearly.
- ✓ Communications are another opportunity to include your venue's basic **access information**. If there's an Accessible Toilet, tell us! If your venue is Step Free, let us know!
- ✓ Ask people for feedback and **listen** to what they have to say!

80% OF ADULTS
WITH A
LEARNING
DISABILITY
WERE IN BED
OR READY FOR
BED AT 8PM ON
A FRIDAY
NIGHT

— An Inquiry by Social Workers into Evening Routines in Community Living Settings for Adults with Learning Disabilities (2017)

FREE TICKETS FOR PERSONAL ASSISTANTS



A person with a learning disability and/or autism might have some additional needs that can make attending events alone very challenging, if not impossible. If a person wants to attend an event, they often need to bring a **PA** to support them with travel, communication, decision-making and/or personal care. This person could be their family, friend or someone they pay to support them.

If a person wants to go to an event, they will often have to pay for their PA's ticket as well. Many people with learning disabilities have a low income and paying for an extra ticket for their support can make attending a gig unaffordable. Providing a free ticket to events for PAs gives people with learning disabilities more opportunities to attend the events they want to go to and empowers them to make decisions about how they want to socialise.

**"A FREE TICKET MEANS THAT PERSON KNOWS
THEIR SUPPORT CAN BE THERE WITH THEM" -
DAVID, GIG BUDDY**

PLEASE CONSIDER:

Many venues and promoters ask people to provide proof that they are entitled to a free PA ticket. We strongly discourage this practice. We think it's best to trust your audience as it can be uncomfortable for people having to 'prove' that they require additional support. If you do need to ask someone to explain why they need a PA ticket, keep it brief and refrain from asking for detailed medical or personal details.

EARLY ACCESS AND QUEUE JUMPS



Knowing that you can get early access to a venue or being guaranteed a place at the front of the queue can **dramatically reduce anxiety** for someone when planning their night out.

"I find the process rather difficult. I need to sit because of a physical disability and this makes me anxious so I end up arriving VERY early" – Gig Buddies Belfast R&D Survey

Early access allows people to get accustomed to the gig space and helps them to **navigate their own anxieties** before having to deal with a large crowd. This measure **eases that person into their night out** and makes the overall experience more enjoyable.

For others, it can be isolating to show up much earlier than everyone else. However, they might not be physically able to stand for long periods in the queue. Queue jump allows a person to **experience the 'normality' of a night out while still recognising their additional needs**.

"We were able to enter the venue before the main crowd which meant we could get some seats. This was very helpful." – Richard, Gig Buddy

If you are a seated venue, early access helps people find their seats at a **comfortable pace**. If you are a usually a standing venue, early access helps people to **secure one of the limited seats before the crowds arrive**.



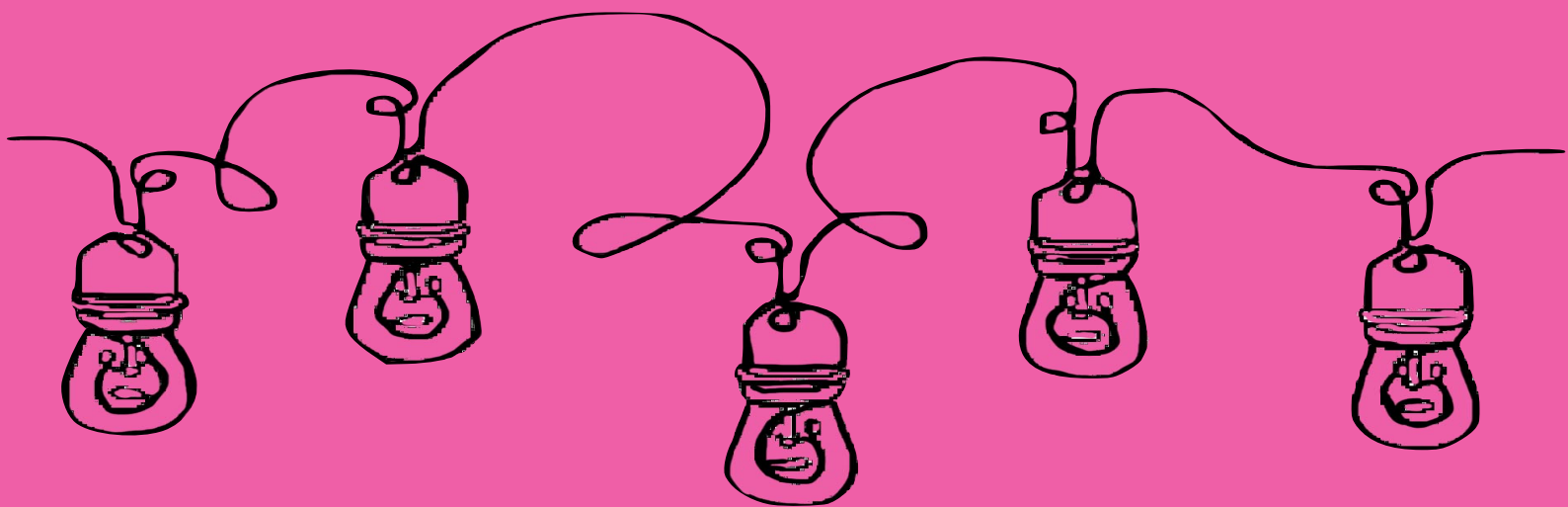
EARPLUGS

Earplugs are an inexpensive yet effective way to make a gig more accessible. Keeping a supply of **disposable foam earplugs** behind the bar can prevent someone from becoming overwhelmed by the sound. This measure helps them to stay in the gig where they can keep enjoying themselves!

SET GUIDES

Set guides can be an excellent tool for reducing anxiety and increasing accessibility as you allow people to prepare for or remove themselves from any parts of the set that they will find challenging. Providing this information in advance is particularly helpful for people with **sensory issues** and is especially important when **strobe lights** or **smoke machines** are featured.





QUIET SPACES

Sometimes the sensory impact of a gig, with its loud noises and bright lights, can be particularly overwhelming for a person with learning disabilities and/or autism. This is not to say they don't enjoy the gig experience but a quiet space can provide them with the chilled-out environment they may need, helping them to **manage any stress** they are experiencing by taking a **short break** from the show.

If you are able to provide a quiet space, please ensure that:

- ✓ The room's **purpose and location** is clearly outlined — **signposting** that uses a mixture of text and images is good for this!
- ✓ The room is **comfortable**. The quiet space should be a **welcoming** place to relax and take a break — it's not a time out zone. So although a store room might be quiet, it's not very welcoming. Chairs, cushions, and soft lighting can help make the quiet space a relaxing place to spend some time, away from the loud gig.



THE HIDDEN DISABILITIES SUNFLOWER

The **Sunflower Lanyard** is a discreet, globally-recognised indicator that the wearer might require some additional support due to their hidden disability. These campaigns can only be successful if venue staff are aware of their meaning so it is important to ensure all venue staff are informed of the significance of the Sunflower Lanyard by adopting relevant training processes and having open conversations about accessibility.

THE JAM CARD: JUST A MINUTE



The JAM card by the NOW Group can be either a **physical card** or **digital display on the JAM app** that a person with a disability can show when they require a bit of **extra time and support**. For many people with learning disabilities and/or autism, customer service situations can be stressful for many reasons. The JAM Card empowers people with disabilities to be independent and helps them navigate situations that they may find stressful by letting a staff member know that they require some additional support! The JAM Card is a campaign **specific to Northern Ireland** so it's essential for staff to understand its meaning to ensure accessibility for people with disabilities in your venue.

WHERE CAN I GET EVEN MORE INFORMATION?



GIG BUDDIES BELFAST: We are a project run for and by adults with learning disabilities and/or autism so we are happy to share our experiences of accessibility with you. We can point you in the right direction for disability awareness training and can share our resources.

<https://www.blackboxbelfast.com>



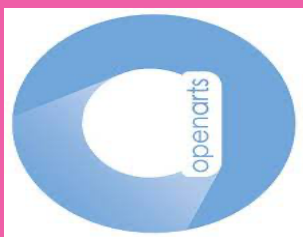
STAY UP LATE: Stay Up Late is the charity behind the #NOBEDTIMES campaign and can help you keep accessibility punk!

<https://stayuplate.org>



ATTITUDE IS EVERYTHING: Attitude is Everything have been leading the way in access for D/deaf and disabled people for over 20 years. Their website has lots of great resources that you and your organisation can consult. Check out their DIY Access Guide!

<http://attitudeiseverything.org.uk>



OPEN ARTS: Open Arts offer advice and training in Disability Equality. They can help you gain an understanding of how to improve accessibility and facilitate discussions around attitudes towards people with disabilities.

<https://openartsni.org>



UNIVERSITY OF ATYPICAL: The University of Atypical is a disabled-led charity that supports people who are D/deaf and disabled and their involvement in the arts. They can help you with diverse programming and general enquiries.

<https://universityofatypical.org>

IF YOU NEED US, LET US
KNOW!



Website:

<https://www.blackboxbelfast.com>



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