



Welcome!

Somerset Libraries Presents.... The Library Takeover: Creating a Space for All

Funded by Carnegie UK Trust and Wellcome Trust as part of their *Engaging Libraries* project.



Innovative

**Health &
Wellbeing**

Engaging!



**Engaging
Libraries**

**Libraries as
community
spaces**

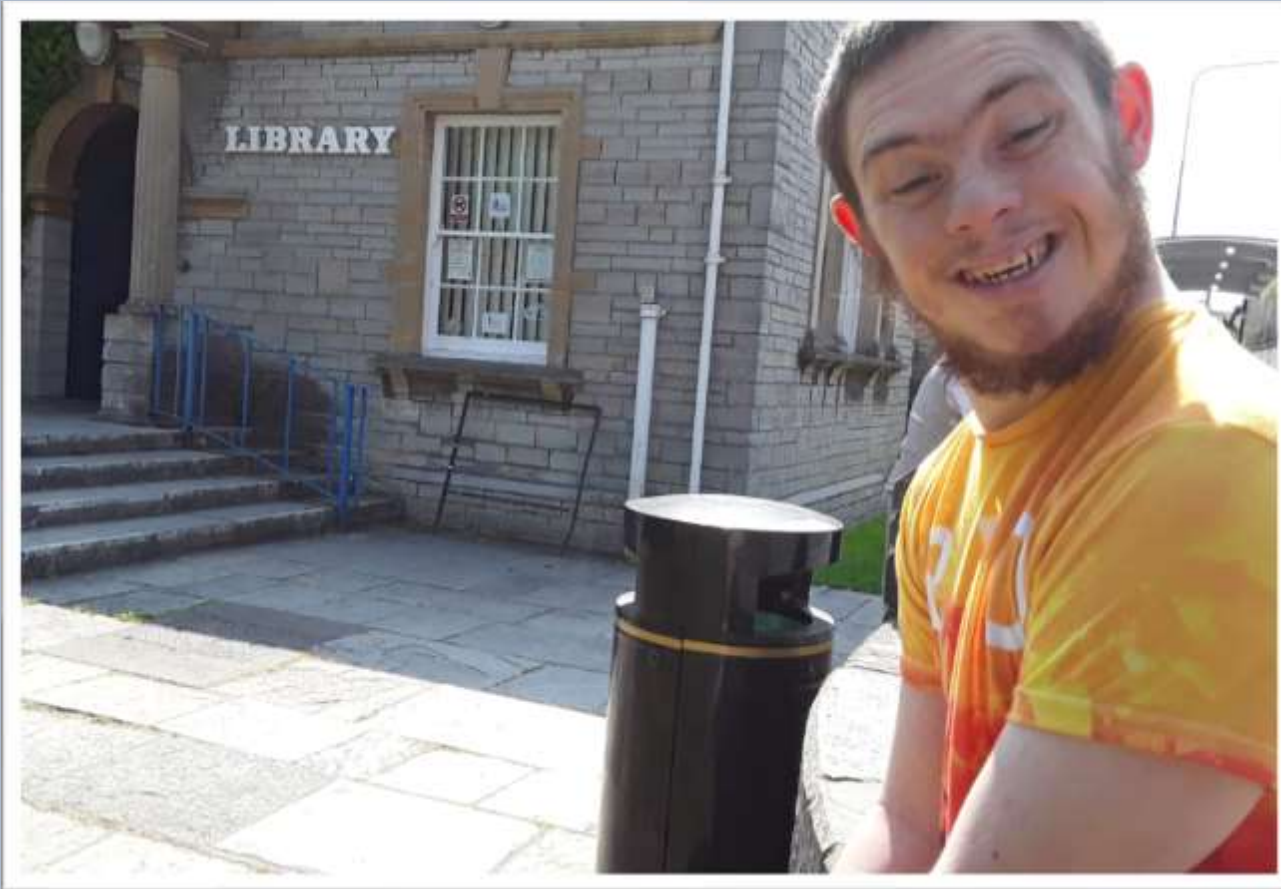
Creative

The Library Takeover...

A collaborative project between Somerset Libraries, Adult Social Care, Creativity Works and Somerset Film



The Library Takeover: Creating a Space for All



Our Aims:

- To engage our whole community in talking and thinking about learning disabilities
- To work with people with learning disabilities to discover how our libraries and other public spaces can be more inclusive for those with LD.



Our Engagement Methods

- **Stage 1:** 'Library Takeover' days for participants with Learning Disabilities to volunteer and learn more about libraries
- **Stage 2:** Creative workshops for participants to reflect on their experiences in libraries
- **Stage 3:** Public Exhibition using art to engage the public in the experiences of participants
- **Stage 4:** Short film documenting the project and aimed at providing further opportunities for public engagement

Stage 1: Library Takeover Days

Participants had a prolonged period of time to learn about libraries and to become comfortable in the environment

This was very important as many participants had high levels of anxiety or lacked confidence in communication

Library staff became heavily invested in the project in a way they were unlikely to have had the time to do otherwise

Engaged the public in the project where we had volunteers engaged in public facing activities e.g. Rhyme-time, Helpdesk



Volunteering





“Doing the job was really quite easy to do. I enjoyed doing what I was doing. People on reception were really friendly and nice and polite. I want to go back again... The day went too quick for me”. - Participant

Volunteering

Stage 2: Creative Workshops

Local arts organisation *Creativity Works* recruited 2 artists to **facilitate** workshops

Creativity Works specialise in **socially engaged** arts!

Workshops used different forms of art to **explore** participants **feelings** about libraries

For many people, **art** is not their preferred form of expression and so we explored **different methods** including photography, film, writing, jokes and making maps.







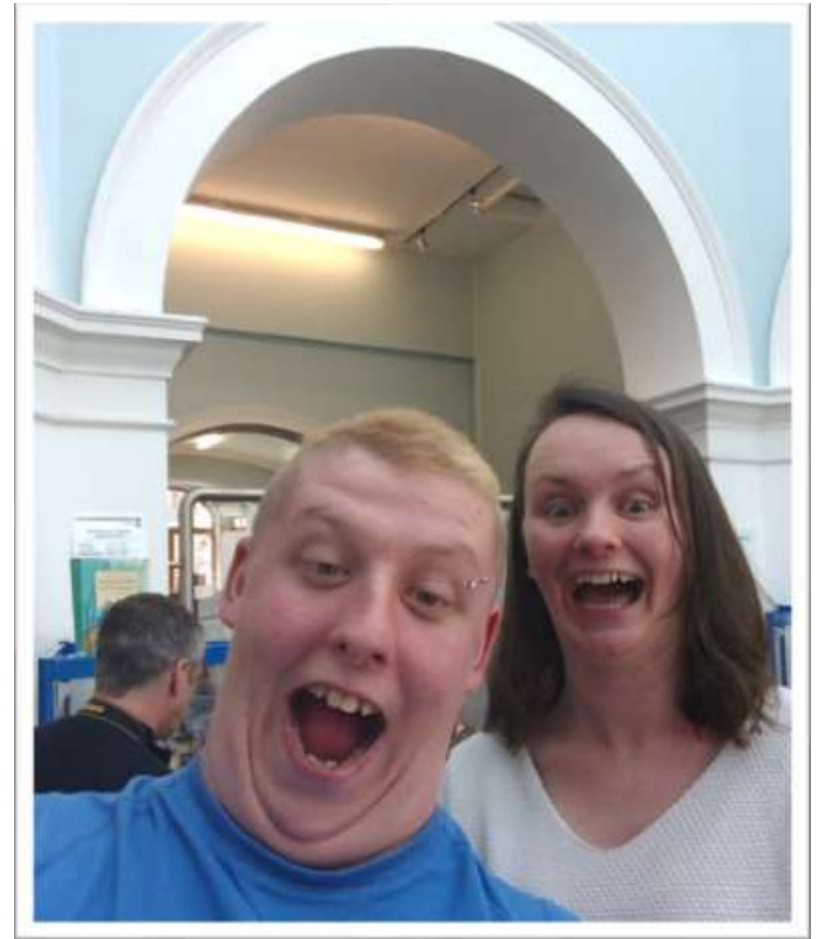
Stage 3: Public Exhibition

Our plans for the exhibition changed a lot!

We discovered that a collective response wouldn't be appropriate as each participant's experience has been so different!

Primary focus is to create something that allows the public to reflect on what it means to have a disability , and offer their own responses

Reflect the **fun** we've had – learning disabilities don't have to be a bad thing!



Stage 4: Film documentary

Local charity *Somerset Film* have been training participants to film and document the project.

A really valuable alternative form of engagement, as a number of participants preferred to express themselves through either filming others or speaking on camera

An effective way of engaging a wider section of the public and there has been a high level of interest from the disabilities sector in seeing the final film.



Search "Somerset Engaging Libraries" on YouTube to see the final film

Film Making



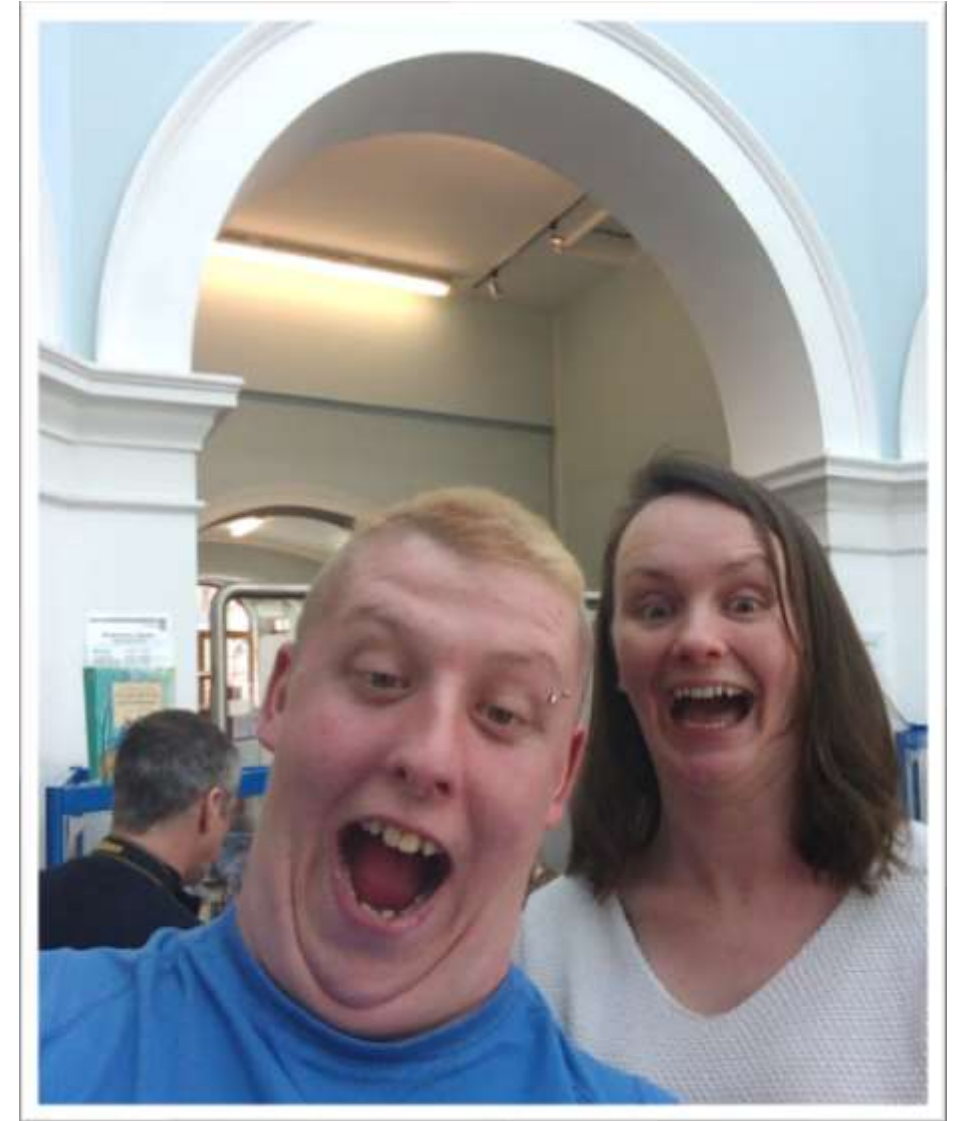
Film Making



Results:

Seeing our libraries with new eyes!

- Colour very popular, more colour, more welcoming
- Current signage unhelpful – not always easy to understand, images more helpful, alongside a more instinctive of splitting books into themes
- Charges around loans and late returns hard to understand
- Continued provision of free or low cost activities



What has been the most challenging aspect of the project?

- **Staff engagement:** Lack of staff time combined with apprehensiveness around working with people with LD meant that it was very difficult to get libraries to prioritise the project.
However staff have been surprised and we now have some big staff advocates for the project
- **Time:** Working with people with LD is very time intensive. The rewards are great but it has required a lot of time investment in both the project management and delivery
- **Additional challenges of having a disability:** The additional needs of the participants meant that nothing ever went quite as planned. We had a number of attendees drop out and there were many instances of participants forgetting to attend, being ill, struggling with transport or simply not feeling 'up to it', and communication was often difficult .
- **Having a learning disability** also meant that expressing feelings and thoughts was very difficult for many participants , making the engagement part quite challenging at times

What learning can your experiences offer the wider sector?

- **Volunteering opportunities:** We have learnt that many people with learning disabilities are desperate for the opportunity to volunteer, work or simply feel useful. There is a real lack of opportunity to do this but libraries are well placed to offer placements. Our participants have LOVED working in libraries.
- **Planning:** A lot more planning is involved when working with people with LD. It is well worth consulting with local experts before embarking on an LD project. Patience and adaptability are crucial too.
- **Artist make you see your library differently.** Working with artists has brought a level of creativity to the library that it lacked. More of this would be great
- **People with disabilities make you see your library even more differently!** Libraries have a lot to offer people with disabilities but I'm not sure I would have predicted any of them. This can only really be achieved by working directly with them

Our good news stories

Emma - “I love working with the people who work at the Library they are nice, kind, respectful & helpful when supporting me....I love it there”.

Now on a 3 month volunteering placement at her library (A library which also had been very reluctant to take part initially!)



Lydia and Lauren – “This is the best I’ve seen them perform at any task in the two years I’ve worked with them”. College tutor



Library staff - “It’s been a great opportunity to work with and get to know our customers properly, which I don’t get to do much anymore”





Thanks for listening....

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Twitter @SomersetLib

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