



Doing, showing and going

Mencap's arts strategy

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Foreword by Simon Cramp

Mencap trustee and National Assembly representative

‘We can take care of the body, but if we also don’t take care of the mind, we can’t lead meaningful, independent lives’.

These words, by one disabled artist, capture the essence of what Mencap’s new arts strategy is all about. In short, the strategy sets out what Mencap need to do to give people with a learning disability the chance to get involved in the arts. And this means both producing and appreciating them.

As someone with a learning disability, I feel very strongly that every individual with a learning disability should be able to take part in and enjoy all the same activities as everyone else in society.

This is, of course, what Mencap is trying to achieve in everything we do: we are fighting for a world where every individual with a learning disability has an equal right to choice, opportunity and respect, with the support they need. This applies as much to the arts as it does things like housing, education or employment.

So, people with a learning disability should have the opportunity to express and explore themselves through art, a choice in how they do this, and the respect of others in that choice. And this strategy sets out, I believe, an excellent framework for this vision to become a reality in the years to come.

Simon Cramp

Foreword by Lord Rix

President of Mencap

The arts are the most potent and individual means we have of making sense of ourselves and the world around us. I know this to be true from my own experiences as a professional actor. And this is something which should apply to everybody, including those who have a learning disability. Simon Cramp makes this point very powerfully in his foreword above.

The theory here is simple, but profound: if we share our art publicly through performance, exhibition or otherwise, then we are sharing our perceptions of the world. This helps everyone to know how we think and feel. It can also help others think about how they feel.

So the arts are, in essence, an expression of who we are. This presents many great opportunities for people with a learning disability: both to develop self-awareness and confidence, and to let other people know about their wishes and aspirations for their lives.

There are two main principles that underpin Doing, showing and going – Mencap's arts strategy. We want to promote equal opportunity and diversity in the arts, and we want to encourage the creation of high quality, original work by people with a learning disability, which will reflect their individual experiences. This is central to Mencap's vision for the future for all people with a learning disability.

But this strategy isn't just about principles. It's also about the practicalities of how Mencap – in partnership with arts organisations across the country – can provide proper access to facilities, venues and performances covering a wide range of art forms for people with a learning disability. Their voice and their choice can thus be heard now and in the future.



Lord Rix

Introduction

Background

Mencap is the biggest learning disability charity in this country. There are also about 1,000 local Mencap groups who run themselves.

Learning disability affects the lives of some 1.5 million people in the UK. Around 210,000 of these have a severe learning disability.

Mencap is the leading UK charity working with people with a learning disability and their families and carers in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Aside from our work at a national level, most of Mencap's leisure activities – including those in the arts – are run or supported by our network of more than 1,000 local societies, affiliated clubs and associate member groups.

Aim of strategy

Mencap wants people with a learning disability to have better opportunities in the arts. The arts strategy shows the part that Mencap will play in this.

This document has been written in the context of the Disability Discrimination Act, the Government's 2001 White Paper *Valuing People* and Mencap's five-year plan, *Choice, opportunity and respect*, published in autumn 2000. It aims to set out a strategy for improving the quality – and, to a lesser degree, the quantity – of opportunities in the arts for people with a learning disability both within Mencap and throughout wider society.

The arts

When we talk about the arts we mean:

- telling a story
- painting or drawing a picture
- dancing
- taking photographs
- making music
- acting in a play
- making a video...and many, many more things

Equal opportunities and diversity

In the arts, as in all areas of life, individuals should not be discriminated on grounds of race, gender, age, religion, sexual orientation or disability.

This has a particular meaning in the arts since they are an expression of who we are. It is vital that we respect and celebrate difference and diversity.

To achieve this, we must actively tackle the barriers that prevent people's diverse needs and interests being met.

These barriers include:

- stereotyping (for example, making assumptions on the basis of ethnicity or disability)
- personal comments, jokes or action that make people feel like outsiders (everyone has a right to respect and safety)
- the way that we do things – sometimes we can do things in a way that might make it easier for some people to join in but more difficult for others.

Of course life is never simple: people often experience multiple discrimination.

Consultation

Mencap sent a questionnaire to people with a learning disability, parents and carers, Mencap staff and people who work in the arts. This asked them what they want to be able to take part in the arts. More than 1,000 people replied. Most people who replied were people with a learning disability. This means that the voices of people with a learning disability are at the heart of the arts strategy.

This document is a response to a wide consultation Mencap undertook throughout 2001 with our members and staff, as well as parents and carers of people with a learning disability. At the heart of this resulting strategy are the voices of people with a learning disability.

A total of 3,800 questionnaires were sent to Mencap homes, Gateway clubs and local societies. 1,059 completed forms were returned. (By general market research standards the response rate of 27.87% is well above average).

The answers given in these questionnaires make up the main information on which this strategy is based.

The vast majority of respondents – 92.4% – were people with a learning disability. This means that this strategy is a true reflection of the views of people with a learning disability. It's worth noting, however, that some of these respondents may have received varying levels of support to complete the questionnaires.

We also held a series of consultation events with people with a learning disability around the country. These events were a mixture of presentations, workshops in a range of art forms, and discussions. The London event focussed on issues for people from minority ethnic groups. This consultation process, including with people from minority ethnic groups, has continued throughout 2002 and will continue in the coming years.

The thinking in this document is also based, in part, on some of the outstanding work that independent organisations have done over recent years in the field of learning disability arts.

We consulted with several arts organisations including:

- the Arts Funding System (the Arts Council of England, Wales and Northern Ireland and the ten Regional Arts Boards, as they were then called)
- the Department of Culture, Media and Sport
- leading bodies in the field, such as the Foundation for Community Dance and the National Disability Arts Forum
- individuals working in the field who were approached either directly or via press releases.

So, this strategy is an attempt to make sense of what a broad range of people have told us about how we can meet the desires and aspirations of people with a learning disability in the arts. What has been clear from the impressive response to the consultation is how important the arts are to people with a learning disability.

Some definitions

In considering how we can best improve the quality of arts opportunities for people with a learning disability, it's first worth considering the meaning of two common phrases: 'arts and disability' and 'disability arts'. These have been used over recent years by the arts funding and disability arts worlds. The meanings of these phrases, however, are in continual flux. And neither phrase adequately describes the issues that need to be considered in relation to learning disability arts.

Arts and disability

The term 'arts and disability' refers to opportunities for disabled people to develop an appreciation of, and an involvement in, the arts. This phrase also encompasses integrated or inclusive arts activities.

'Arts and disability' is about providing skills and training for disabled people and access to the arts – both through participation and as part of an audience. This access can be delivered or facilitated by non-disabled people.

Disability art

'Disability art' is produced exclusively by disabled people. It incorporates disability issues as an integral part of the art form.

Disability art has developed as an art form that strongly reflects the disabled person's perspective. It is an integral part of the wider disability movement. Many 'disability arts' organisations and artists have grown out of 'arts and disability' projects.

Opportunities

Doing: Participatory projects

In our questionnaire we asked Mencap members what kind of activities they would like to do in the future. We found that:

- people would like to do many more different things than they are able to do now
- most people preferred activities that both people with a learning disability and people who do not have a disability can take part in
- people liked working with professional artists.

Mencap members participate in a broad range of arts and leisure activities. In our questionnaire we asked them what they kind of activities they would like to do in the future. The answers to this showed that people would like to do many more different things than they are able to do now. There was also a particular emphasis in what people said on performance or other public art activity.

The four main places where these arts activities have been taking place to date were:

- at home (63%)
- in day centres (49.1%)
- at college (33.5%)
- in Gateway Clubs (32.6%).

An overwhelming number (87.9%) preferred integrated or inclusive activities. A substantial majority (76.4%) had not had an opportunity to work with professional artists. Of those who had, 97.8% had found it a good experience.

Mencap will continue to support this participatory activity. We will do this by creating a 'ladder of opportunity', enabling people to progress according to their aspirations and experience. Specifically, we will:

- continue the local arts awards (small arts grants given to affiliated groups for arts activities, currently provided by the Mencap Challenge Fund)
- help local groups identify regional and local funding opportunities by offering them advice and bringing new funding opportunities to their attention via *Mencap arts news* (see below)
- help clubs and societies identify artists with skills in community and disability arts work, via a central database
- organise 'taster' art days – allowing club and society organisers and members to meet community artists and see their work
- helping clubs and societies broaden the range of what they offer to include, for example, digital arts, street theatre, DJ-ing, animation and cabaret
- establish a training programme and training resources – for staff and volunteers – in contemporary good practice in arts by and with people with a learning disability. A video and booklet on good practice in the arts by and with people with a learning disability, entitled *More than fun*, is being launched alongside this strategy
- offer training to artists and arts organisations to enable better and more widespread inclusive activities
- develop events to act as a focus for this activity
- work on creating further opportunities for children and young people with a learning disability in the arts
- establish a programme of activities to extend Mencap's Family Access project (for families with children with complex needs) around England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Showing: Going public

A lot of people said they wanted to show their art to other people. This might be at a performance or an exhibition.

Sharing what we do with friends and supporters is one thing. But if we are to present it to a paying public, we need to think about what people will expect.

Mencap will work to give people with a learning disability the opportunity to present their work in the best possible way.

A sizeable majority of people we consulted wished to show their art to other people (for example, through performance or exhibition).

This raises some important questions: when and in what context does one present work? And to whom?

Sharing what we do with friends and supporters is one thing. But if we are to present it to a paying public, we need to consider people's expectations. Careful thought needs to be given to the manner in which we present things.

To do this, we will:

- develop appropriate opportunities at inclusive, mainstream and disability arts events
- use Mencap arts news to let clubs and societies and individual members know about forthcoming arts festivals (both mainstream and disability)
- keep abreast of – and share – news of national and regional disability arts and touring initiatives
- share news of what work is available from clubs and societies
- help local clubs create media packs and press releases.

- seek to secure and deliver appropriate public art commissions
- work alongside broadcasters in creating appropriate programmes and story lines involving people with a learning disability; and in finding employment opportunities for people with a learning disability both in front of and behind the camera
- make use of Mencap's sizeable membership across the country – as a fertile field for national tours
- work with venues on new audience development
- develop National initiatives (such as the *Open your eyes* calendar and exhibition and the Mencap compilation CD *Like a river flows*)
- develop international exchanges
- engage in the debate about artistic quality (see below).

Going: Enjoying the arts

People said they wanted to see and hear lots of different things. Mencap thinks it is important that people get the chance to see new and exciting works of art. This will help them develop their own works of art.

Mencap will find out ways to give people with a learning disability more opportunities to see and hear what they want to.

The consultation asked some questions about what people like to see or hear. The answers reflected a huge and diverse set of interests. A very sizeable majority wanted to see contemporary, as opposed to traditional, arts. Perhaps the most useful learning point came in the reasons people gave for why they didn't get to see or hear what they wanted. The top six reasons were:

- money (17.9%)
- not getting to hear about shows (17.7%)
- transport (16.8%)
- attitudinal barriers (13.3%)
- being at the wrong time (11.1%)

- no one to take them there (10.8%).

As anyone would testify, simply being part of an audience can be an exciting and fulfilling experience. For artists, though, it's about much more than the experience: the opportunity to see cutting-edge contemporary work is vital to their development. That's why it's vital that people with a learning disability have opportunities not only to take part in arts activities, but also to see relevant professional work.

To make this happen, we will:

- work with venues on new audience development – for both contemporary and traditional arts – helping them overcome the barriers identified in the consultation
- use *Mencap arts news* as a platform for letting members know about events, tours and concessions.

Information and training

Training

Mencap will work to give more training in the arts to people with a learning disability. We will also work with arts organisations and artists to help them work better with people with a learning disability to do this. These are organisations like arts councils and local authorities.

To support this strategy, as well as offering the training opportunities outlined above, we will:

- assist the arts councils, local authorities and other agencies in reviewing what training and career development opportunities are available to artists with a learning disability
- assist the arts councils and other agencies in implementing the recommendations of these reviews, where appropriate
- spread information about training opportunities in *Mencap arts news*
- lobby for changes to the benefits system as part of our work to improve career development opportunities for artists with a learning disability.

Providing information

Mencap staff, volunteers and members said that they did not have enough information about arts opportunities.

Mencap will make more information about the arts available to people with a learning disability. This will mainly be through *Mencap arts news*. We will also set up an accessible national database of organisations and artists who work with people with a learning disability. This database will also include artists with a learning disability. We will think about setting up a learning disability arts website.

During the consultation, Mencap staff, volunteers and members highlighted a lack of information about arts opportunities.

In support of this strategy we will disseminate information as outlined above, primarily through *Mencap arts news*.

We will also set up a national database of organisations and artists who work with people with a learning disability, other arts organisations, plus artists with a learning disability. This database is being developed in a consortium with *27A Access Artspace* (Leicester) and *Open Theatre* (Coventry).

We will further explore establishing an interactive learning disability arts website.

We will continue to establish links between Mencap's website and relevant arts-related websites.

Conference

Mencap will plan a national learning disability arts conference in 2004.

There has been a call from several quarters for a national learning disability arts conference. This has come from within Mencap, the arts funding system and from independent arts organisations. Mencap is well positioned to host such a conference. This would be a chance to discuss and review the big issues, forge effective partnerships and provide a structure for continuous networking. It is proposed that this conference should take place in 2004 and that its theme would be related to the development of the interactive learning disability arts website mentioned above.

Action plan

2003	2004	Ongoing
Establish training programme, training resources and 'taster' art days (January)	Arts Conference	Local arts awards
Launch Mencap arts news (April)	New audience development programme begins	Develop appropriate opportunities in inclusive and mainstream arts events.
Launch database (April)	Launch programme of international exchanges	National initiatives
Roll out Mencap's Family Access programme (Autumn)		Public art commissions

Structure for delivery

Mencap has a National Arts Co-ordinator. Mencap will employ more people to work on the arts strategy across the country.

We want to get more people with a learning disability involved in developing the arts strategy. At the moment, there is an advisory group with people with a learning disability from across the country. We plan to make this group bigger.

Arts activities within Mencap will still mainly take place through local groups. The National Arts Co-ordinator and regional arts officers will offer practical support to local groups.

Mencap currently has a National Arts Co-ordinator with responsibility for:

- policy development in the arts
- liaising with national bodies such as the Arts Council of England, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and the National Disability Arts Forum
- developing and managing national and international initiatives
- disbursing local arts awards
- offering advice and information on arts and people with a learning disability – both within Mencap and to outside organisations.

Clearly, all of the above will remain essential to the delivery of the strategy. However, the emphasis will need to shift from developing policy to delivering and monitoring it, as well as developing and co-ordinating regional arts posts (where practical, in liaison with regional disability development agencies). These posts would be managed by Mencap's community support team managers.

The regional arts officers would be responsible for:

- making decisions about local arts awards, in liaison with community support team managers
- liaising with regional arts councils, local authorities, regional cultural consortia and regional disability development agencies
- supporting arts activities in Mencap affiliated clubs and societies
- organising regional events and public art commissions.

We will be establishing strategies for the public involvement of people with a learning disability in the development of policy. At the moment, the National Arts Co-ordinator has an advisory body with people with a learning disability from across the country. We plan to develop this body and extend its role into external policy meetings and training. We also plan for each regional post to have a steering group of local activists with a learning disability.

The main arena for arts activities within Mencap will continue to be through our local groups. We will help them grow and flourish in a rich and varied way. The role of the National Arts Co-ordinator and regional arts officers will be to support and develop local groups' activities. We will do this in a way that reflects the standards of Mencap clubs, as well as contemporary good practice in the arts by and with people with a learning disability.

We aim to establish these regional posts over the next five years.

Contact information

Gus Garside

National Arts Co-ordinator

Mencap, Burrell Road, Haywards Heath
West Sussex RH16 1TW
Tel: 01444 459460 – extension 119
Fax: 01444 457051
Mobile: 07879 666887
Email: gus.garside@mencap.org.uk

National Arts Councils for England, Wales and Northern Ireland

The national and regional arts councils provide strategic funding for the arts. Most of them have comprehensive and dynamic disability and arts strategies with a dedicated officer responsible for delivery.

The picture for arts funding in England, in particular, is changing radically. By April 2003, some of the contact information below will change. If you have problems contacting anyone, you can obtain up-to-date information from Mencap's National Arts Co-ordinator.

The Arts Council of England

14 Great Peter Street, London SW1P 3NQ
Tel: 020 7333 0100
Fax: 020 7973 6590
Email: enquiries@artscouncil.org.uk
website: www.artscouncil.org.uk

The Art Council of Wales

9 Museum Place, Cardiff CF10 3NX
Tel: 029 2037 6500
Fax: 02920 221447
Email: information@ccc-acw.org.uk
Website: www.artsworld.org.uk

The Arts Council of Northern Ireland

MacNeice House, 77 Malone Road
Belfast BT9 6AQ
Tel: 028 90 385200
Fax: 028 90 661715
Email: publicaffairs@artscouncil-ni.org
Website: www.artscouncil-ni.org

Regional Arts Councils (England only)

For links to regional websites, visit the website: www.arts.org.uk

East England Arts

(covering Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Essex, Hertfordshire, Norfolk and Suffolk, and Luton, Peterborough, Southend-on-Sea and Thurrock unitary authorities)

The Helpdesk, East England Arts
Eden House, 48–49 Bateman Street
Cambridge CB2 1LR
Tel: 01223 454400
Email: info@eearts.co.uk
Website: www.eastenglandarts.org

East Midland Arts

(covering Derbyshire, Leicestershire, Lincolnshire, Northamptonshire, Nottinghamshire and Rutland)

Mountfields House, Epinal Way
Loughborough, Leics LE11 0QE
Tel: 01509 218 292
Fax: 01509 262 214
Email: info@em-arts.co.uk

Northern Arts

(covering Tees Valley, County Durham, Northumberland, Tyne and Wear)

Central Square, Forth Street

Newcastle-upon-Tyne NE1 3PJ

Tel: 0191 255 8500

Fax: 0191 230 1020

Email: info@northernarts.org.uk

North West Arts

(covering Cheshire, Cumbria, Greater Manchester, Lancashire, Merseyside and the unitary authorities of Blackburn with Darwen, Blackpool, Halton and Warrington)

Manchester House, 22 Bridge Street

Manchester M3 3AB

Tel: 0161 834 6644

Fax: 0161 834 6969

Minicom: 0161 834 9131

Email: info@nwarts.co.uk

Southern and South East Arts

(covering Buckinghamshire, East Sussex, Hampshire, Isle of Wight, Kent, Oxfordshire, Surrey, and West Sussex, and the unitary authorities of Bracknell Forest, Brighton and Hove, Medway, Milton Keynes, Portsmouth, Reading, Slough, Southampton, West Berkshire, Windsor and Maidenhead and Wokingham)

Tunbridge Wells Office – Union House,
Eridge Road, Tunbridge Wells

Kent TN4 8HF

Tel: 01892 507 200

Fax: 0870 242 1259

Email: info@seab.co.uk

South West Arts

(covering Cornwall, Devon, Gloucestershire, and Somerset, the unitary authority areas of Bristol, Bath & North East Somerset, North Somerset, South Gloucestershire, Plymouth and Torbay, and rural Dorset. From 1 April 2003, Wiltshire, Swindon, Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole will also be covered.)

Bradinch Place, Gandy Street

Exeter EX4 3LS

Tel: 01392 218 188

Fax: 01392 229 229

Minicom: 01392 433503

Email: info@swa.co.uk

West Midlands Arts

(covering Herefordshire, Worcestershire, Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin, Staffordshire, Warwickshire, Stoke-on-Trent and the West Midlands Metropolitan Districts)

82 Granville Street, Birmingham B1 2LH

Tel: 0121 631 3121

Fax: 0121 643 7239

Minicom: 0121 643 2815

Email: info@west-midlands-arts.co.uk

Yorkshire Arts

(covering Yorkshire and the Humber)

21 Bond Street, Dewsbury

West Yorkshire WF13 1AX

Tel: 01924 455 555

Fax: 01924 466 522

Minicom: 01924 438585

Email: info@yarts.co.uk

Other useful contacts

London Arts

2 Pear Tree Court, London EC1R 0DS

Tel: 020 7608 6100

Fax: 020 7608 4100

Textphone: 020 7608 4101

Email: info@lonab.co.uk

Most unitary authorities, county and district councils have arts development officers who have, as part of their cultural strategies, a commitment to arts and disability and disability arts. Contact details can be obtained from NALGAO (the National Association of Local Government Arts officer):

NALGAO

36 Gwendolin Avenue, Birstall

Leicester LE4 4HD

Tel: 0116 2671441

Fax: 0116 2671441

Email: nalgao@aol.com

Website: www.nalgao.org.uk

National Foundation for Youth Music

1 America Street, London SE1 0NE

Tel: 020 7902 1060

Fax: 020 7902 1061

Email: info@youthmusic.org.uk

Website: www.youthmusic.org.uk

Sound Sense (*incorporating the National Disability Information Service*)

Sarah Bennett-Day at NMDIS, 7 Tavern Street, Stowmarket, Suffolk IP14 1PJ

Tel: 014496 73990 Fax: 01449 673994

Email: info@soundsense.org

Website: www.soundsense.org

Foundation for Community Dance

Cathedral Chambers, 2 Peacock Lane
Leicester LE1 5PX

Tel: 0116 251 0516

Fax: 0116 251 0517

Email: info@communitydance.org.uk

Website: www.communitydance.org.uk

National Disability Arts Forum

(*can also provide information on regional disability arts development agencies*)

Mea House, Ellison Place

Newcastle-upon-Tyne NE1 8XS

Tel : 0191 2611628

Fax: 0191 222 0573

Textphone: 0191 261 2237

Email: ndaf@ndaf.org

Website: www.ndaf.org

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Learning Disability Helpline 0808 808 1111