

ACCESS AWARENESS AND RELAXED PERFORMANCE TRAINING

Transcribed by: The SMSIT Accessible Media Department

CHERYL BLACKMAN: We had an opportunity to go to a two-day session here in Toronto, and what that really did for us was it gave us background. It helped us understand the philosophy behind relaxed performances, why they're important. You know, how we can work with our community, people with autism, people with learning disabilities, and how we can create the right kinds of atmospheres in a theatre setting so that people who have autism or who have a learning disability feel welcome.

KIRSTY HOYLE: We have been invited by the British Council to come and spend a week in Toronto working with a variety of different venues, organizations and individuals to promote the Relaxed Performance model, which is something that we work on across the whole of the UK.

LUCY MCKENZIE: The types of people that will benefit from relaxed performances are those with autism spectrum conditions, learning difficulties such as Down syndrome where sensory sensitivities make up such a large part of who they are and how they can interact with the world, and it can also exclude them from a lot that's going on in the world. And through the environment, we can make very small adaptations that will make them feel included, make them feel comfortable, reduce anxieties and allow them to be able to enjoy the experience. It's supposed to be an enjoyable experience being able to come to the theatre.

ADAMSON: What I've learned, we've done several relaxed performances now. But what we're learning from Kirsty and Lucy is how to ensure that we're meeting best practices in not only the implementation of those performances but in how we market them, and how we talk about them, and how we do assessment.

MCKENZIE: Coming to the theatre can be quite anxiety inducing. There's lots of unknown factors, so we introduce things like visual stories. So this is a simple document that takes you through what's going to happen when you arrive at the theatre, before you get to the theatre, and once you're in the auditorium.

ADAMSON: We hope that all organizations will start or continue to program relaxed performances across their whole program of work, be that be a gallery. We have relaxed tours of galleries, or whether that be an exhibition space. We also hope that relaxed performances influence audiences more widely to be more tolerant and inclusive. Relaxed performances are not supposed to be for one type of person. They're supposed to be for everybody, and we find that everybody does come. So we hope, yeah, that the impact is influencing other audiences to be more tolerant of one another.