



Trail Blazing: A short guide to making your heritage event more accessible

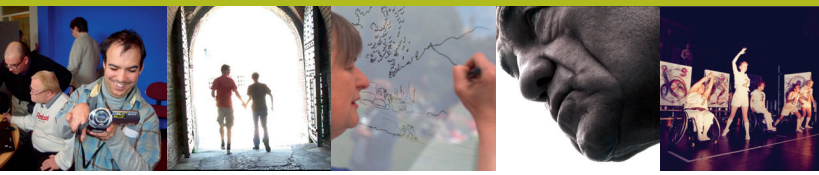


This material covers the main “tips” to make your heritage event more accessible for deaf and disabled people, particularly exploring some creative thinking. Here we have tried to put together ideas to fit a range of budgets to make your visitors’ experience a bit more ‘user friendly’. These ideas were based on the experiences of Paul Jones and Clare Jefferson who ran the Trail Blazing Accentuate project, at Fort Brockhurst and the Lightship in Haslar Marina in 2011/12. There is a longer version of this information exploring in more detail what happened specifically at the two sites.

This can be found online at www.accentuateuk.org/resources-trail-blazing

Tips for Using Audio

- Provide audio narrative, music or sound collage to tell a story of the room that you are visiting. There are plenty of free sound samples that can be downloaded from the internet (sites such as www.soundbible.com) – or for low cost individual music tracks try www.apple.com/uk/iTunes or similar sites.
- The tracks can be played on CD players or MP3 players. These come at a wide range of prices but for very simple small mp3 players this could be purchased for a cheap as £6 each on www.ebay.co.uk
- At Fort Brockhurst we created a communally shared experience by using Mp3 players with small PC speakers. If the room does not have power sockets the speakers can be powered by batteries. Alternatively the mp3 players could be listened to via personal headphones, so that the visitor can listen to the detail independent of background distractions.
- www.ibeaken.com is a system which allows special barcode labels to be scanned or input into smart phones. This will allow the user to receive



Trail Blazing continued...

additional relevant information if they are unable to access tour information from the environment. You can make simple labels for free with an Ibeaken Lite account.

- Having a BSL interpreter on site would be ideal but not always possible. In the absence of this, consider how to present any audio materials and the tour. The Actual Signs website gives some useful tips on communicating with deaf people.
- If working with a BSL interpreter, give them a copy of your tour brochure in advance.

Tips for using Textiles

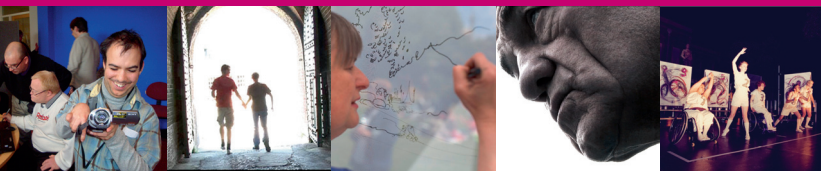
- Tactile pictures which give information or tell a particular story can be made from a variety of materials. At Fort Brockhurst we made textile pieces partly out of authentic war uniforms. They had the added bonus of having an authentic musty smell.
- Simple fabric puppets can be made to enhance a tour, adding a tactile and colourful dimension.
- Try to borrow or obtain original clothing or uniforms from your particular era. People love to feel the different fabric and even have a go at dressing up.



Providing information at your event

We decided to provide extra information for visitors in plain English booklets that could be borrowed during the tour. We produced two: a brochure aimed at hearing impaired people included audio descriptions of the soundtrack and reinforced the information given by the tour guide. A brochure aimed at visually impaired people was made with large font and mainly described the content of the tactile pictures.

- Braille or large print booklets can give additional information about each individual area. Raised maps and diagrams can also be useful. The RNIB has more information on producing braille.



Trail Blazing continued...

- Images can be enlarged and a larger font can be used in a booklet. The Fort Brockhurst Trail Blazing booklets for visually impaired and hearing impaired visitors are re examples of these.
- If signs are used, they might need to consist of large letters on a contrasting and uncluttered background or an easily recognisable image such as a tap to represent the washrooms.

Engaging your visitors

Teaching institutions are increasingly aware of different learning styles – visual, aural, tactile etc - and we found it helpful to think about this too. So, when planning a tour you could adjust the content and choice of language to the appropriate level and geared towards a particular angle i.e. some people might be particularly interested in the social/technical/visual aspect of your site. Otherwise your content could be varied so that visitors can access it on many levels. For example at Fort Brockhurst our textile pieces/soundtrack feature personal and social stories of the soldiers as well as technical information about the fort and cannons. We have also included a fun childlike aspect of featuring an appropriate animal in each room.

Some people have difficulty concentrating for long periods, so consider how you might break up the tour into a variety of interactive activities in smaller sections, such as:

- Small tasks/challenges, can you find.....?
- Asking questions to your audience.
- Artifact handling. Tactile artifacts (including copies and castings) can be passed around.
- Videos relevant to the site.

Outreach: bring the venue to the visitor

The experience of the heritage site, particularly inaccessible areas, can be brought to the visitor either on or off site, using artifacts, sound, photographs, textiles, talks. An Outreach Box of materials also acts as a wonderful marketing tool for promoting events. Ideas to try include:

- Photographs/artistic interpretation of rooms or large artifacts.
- Videos of other areas of the sites - especially as digital video technology has now become cheaper and easier to use. The videos could be shown on TVs, laptops and on smart phones.



Trail Blazing continued...

- Camera/sound linkup. Whilst the tour guide is taking a group to an inaccessible area, they can transmit the tour 'live' to visitors in a separate room or in fact to anywhere in the world! This could be achieved with Skype, a laptop (with a small PC camera, or even using a camera phone.)
- A visual/tactile model of the site could be effectively 'walked' around. The guide can speak their usual content, whilst pointing to the relevant location, on allowing participants to feel the model.
- The videos, pictures and soundtracks could be posted to a public website accessed by the internet, so that the 'visitor' can access the site from their own home/library/club/society. The website needn't be costly or require specialist programming knowledge as content can be easily loaded onto social networking sites such as Facebook and YouTube.

Think about people who might be able to help you

Schools, Colleges and Universities have many different curriculum subjects and projects that could fit in with your venue. This would be a way of involving them in a creative challenge. It could also have

the added benefit of bringing a whole new audience to your venue to see their work on display. Universities running Fine Art Degrees, film making courses, Design Degrees etc. may allow you to advertise for voluntary help with your creative project.

- Set a challenge to your local school, college or university to make a 3D model of your premises.
- Set a competition for the best painting/drawing of your premises.
- Get them to create a textile piece using different materials.
- Remember that models can be made from a variety of materials, which are low cost and easy to manipulate, such as modeling clay, paper mache, balsa wood, wooden blocks or even Lego! It doesn't matter as long as it represents the site in some way.
- Enthusiasts may have models or images that you can borrow and showcase for your open day.
- Photographic clubs might like to get involved in taking images and holding an exhibition of their work.

Splodge Designs, January 2012

Splodge Designs are a community arts based company
www.splodgedesigns.com