

INVISIBLE / VISIBLE

THE WORKPLACE



CHANGING RELATIONS
Creative methods. Challenging thinking.

Invisible/Visible is a *Changing Relations* project collecting stories of invisible disability in the workplace and cultural sector. *Invisible/Visible* aims to explore the multitude of lived experiences of people with chronic or invisible disabilities, and how they feel about their identity in relation to work and culture.

Durham University student *Millie Stott* spoke to professionals in theatre, dance, the charity sector and academia about their experiences with their own disabilities and workplace policies. Using her own lived experience with invisible disability and chronic illness, Millie has collected repeating themes from participants to help organisations feel confident approaching disability inclusion, using the real words of interviewees. The participants are anonymous, and their contributions have been invaluable in drawing out key lessons in disability inclusion for workplaces and the cultural sector.

Artist *Hope Simpson* has created both graphics and photography to represent the variety of experience and emotion conveyed by the participants. Her work, informed by her own experiences with disability, creatively interprets motifs from the interviews.

ADJUST

"It's about making the workplace a place where people with hidden disabilities can not only work, but also feel confident in working."

Ask your employee what adjustments would help them thrive in the workplace. Learn about how they manage their condition, and what you can do to support this.

"I think it's easy to feel like the world doesn't want you when you have a disability or an illness because it's too difficult. But actually, there are things out there and there are people out there who value the unique experience that you have."



DON'T ASSUME

"Because I look alright and I've got a bit of makeup on and I've done my hair, they think I'm alright."

Disability looks different on everyone. How people present in the workplace does not necessarily correlate to their pain and fatigue levels.

"People see you stand up straight with a bit of makeup on, oh I saw them in Tesco on the weekend, they must be alright, and they don't see what goes on behind closed doors."



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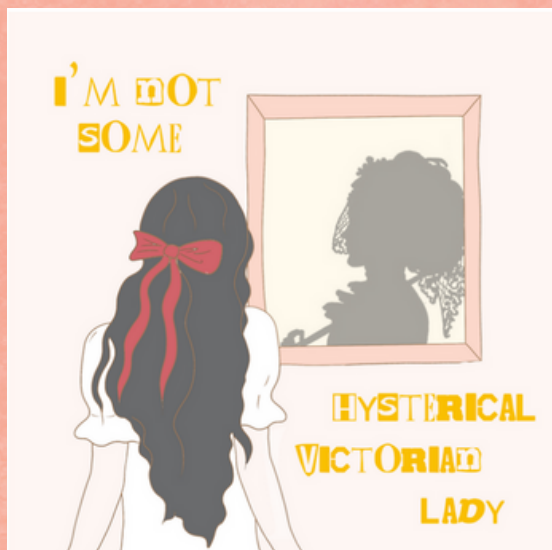
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RECRUIT

"Everybody should have the opportunity to show the best of themselves, and the old traditional interview process just doesn't work for neurodivergent people."

Make adjustments to the call-out and recruitment process to accommodate disabilities and neurodivergence. Offer questions in advance and consider work trials instead of interviews. Provide the opportunity for the disclosure of disabilities during the job application process.

"Remember it's not starting off on a level playing field."



AVOID STEREOTYPES

"There is still this Boys Don't Cry, you're a big chap, get on with it, you'll be alright."

Be aware of gender stereotypes surrounding illness and disability. All genders experience negative stereotyping which makes it harder to disclose disability without risk of judgement or gaslighting, and all genders experience different forms of stereotyping which manifests in varying ways.

"I am a woman and I have emotions. I'm not some hysterical Victorian lady, like, you can't treat me like that."

OPEN UP

"An environment where there are good relationships between people, or environments where it is less surprising and more supported to just be actually ill."

Get comfortable with talking about illness and disability. Book time off for hospital appointments, take sick days without guilt. Model this to your employees.

"And that creates a very different environment actually, when somebody that is responsible for you and a team is openly disabled."

GAGE EXPRESSION

"I don't like being a victim with a label or anything like that. I just want to be me."

Disabled people are not defined by labels or medical terms. Ask employees what level of detail they want others to know about their disability. Designate one person as their workplace contact for support and adjustments so they only share what they want to.

"A continuous and consistent point of contact who mediates what knowledge needs to be shared with everybody else."

And I think it's easy to feel like the world doesn't want you when you have a disability or an illness because it's too difficult. But actually, there are things out there and there are people out there that value the unique experience that you have.



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CULTURAL ORGANISATIONS



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LISTEN

"The dance sector itself, what it does lack in some areas is activities where the artists, the leader of that project have a disability."

Allow disabled people to share their experiences in their own words. Hire disabled activists and educators. Disabled people should have the opportunity to lead inclusion efforts in the cultural sector.

"When you have someone like myself, who's got the lived experiences, it brings another level and another dynamic to it and brings the 'Well this is how it actually is'."

ASK

"We needed to change the way that we talked about disability and that meant changing the way that we thought about disability."

Disabled people all use language differently. Start discussions about disability. Ask instead of assuming. Appreciate the complexity and multifaceted nature of disabled experience.

"Just on a personal level, like I just have so many aspects of my embodiment that are complex and joyful or painful but yes, the language of disability doesn't quite cover that."



ADAPT AND CHANGE

"People just being open to changing things and saying, 'How can we adapt this for you? How can we make it kind of easy for you to attend?' It's asking those questions, which makes you feel valued."

When organising cultural events, consider adaptations which will allow more people to get the most out of the event. Make sure that the format of your publicity is accessible. Understand some people need more warning and longer timescales.

"But I think it's putting the value on the individual and what they can bring."



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CULTURAL ORGANISATIONS

ALLOW DISCUSSION

"I think quite often it's hard for organisations to understand how to deal with disability because they think it's going to be this massive issue and they're scared to have those conversations."

Welcome opportunities for people with disabilities and chronic illnesses to discuss their lived experiences. Medical gaslighting, a changed sense of identity and physical pain can all be part of the disabled experience, and it can be helpful to talk about and learn from the sharing of the stories.

"It's about expression. I feel like not all art spaces are as accepting of expression as others."

ENGAGE CREATIVITY

"I think sometimes I feel like I can't articulate in a conversation with somebody how I feel, but I can write kind of poetry about it."

Creativity and cultural events can be an opportunity for disabled people to speak their truth through artistic mediums. Engage with artists who draw inspiration from their experiences as disabled people, and create safe spaces for this art to be created. Allow for this opportunity to be opened up to participants with disabilities who might value the opportunity to articulate their experience.

"Like even when I'm feeling my darkest, I can still be like, I created that. And I can still create."



CONNECT ONLINE

"Even just having something live streamed, being able to be there, makes you feel included, and it's kind of opened up a lot of things for me that I wouldn't be able to be involved with."

Open up online spaces as alternatives to in-person events, workshops and exhibitions. Get creative with online modes of connection. Utilise online platforms to share art and culture.

"I really feel passionate about sharing stuff online and meeting people and trying to kind of foster that creativity."

