



Man & the Machine

Evaluation report

March 2012

Background

Over the course of the last decade national social care policy, articulated in *Valuing People* and *Valuing People Now*, has set out to tackle the social exclusion suffered by people with learning disabilities by promoting, amongst other things, their rights to full citizenship, person-centred approaches to the support they receive, and through the modernisation of traditional, segregated day services. Individual Budgets and direct payments offer the potential for disabled people to have a greater degree of choice and control over the support they receive and how they spend their time, and encourage greater use of mainstream public facilities.

At the same time obligations have also been placed upon public services and amenities in the form of the Disability Equality Duty (DED) to ensure that disabled people are treated equally and fairly. Specifically, they must:

- promote equality of opportunity between disabled people and other people
- eliminate discrimination that is unlawful under the Disability Discrimination Act
- eliminate harassment of disabled people that is related to their disability
- promote positive attitudes towards disabled people
- encourage participation by disabled people in public life
- take steps to meet disabled people's needs, even if this requires more favourable treatment.

While much of the emphasis in policies promoting social inclusion have focused upon access for people with physical disabilities, there is an increasing realisation that people with learning disabilities are often unable to make full use of public services because appropriate support is not available for them to do so. Specifically, museums and galleries have begun thinking about how they can improve access to their collections for people with learning disabilities. Educational programmes, guided tours, and accessible information are useful starting points and some galleries have devoted space and exhibition time to artists with learning disabilities.

Commissioners of learning disability services are looking to fund alternatives to centre-based day services under the Government's agenda for modernising day services, and a small but growing number of people with learning disabilities are using Direct Payments to purchase daytime support. In most instances Direct Payments are used to employ a personal assistant. However, they may also be used to purchase alternatives to local authority day services including being supported to pursue artistic aspirations in museums and galleries.

Outside-In Pathways

Outside In Pathways (OIP) was set up to work with museums and galleries to provide artistic, educational and social opportunities for people with learning disabilities. It does this by facilitating access to museum and gallery collections and by actively supporting people to use and enjoy them. Tailoring activities to the needs of people with learning disabilities creates a new audience for museums and galleries. This entails raising the awareness of museum and gallery staff, social care providers, families and the general public about the needs of people with learning disabilities, especially around communication and the role that museums and galleries can play in reducing social isolation.

By using the public spaces in museums and galleries for workshops, rehearsals and performances and by employing mainstream artists, performers and technicians to lead the work, OIP aims to promote the citizenship of people with learning disabilities. Many people with learning disabilities either cannot or do wish to take the traditional routes to social inclusion through employment and independent living. Yet they may develop feelings of attachment and belonging through the use of

artistic spaces¹. A review of similar projects concluded that ‘artistic creation has given voice to the marginalized and thereby brought them right into the hallowed halls of the cultural establishment’².

Piloting

The programme of activities for *Man & Machine* had been piloted with the V&A museum. Digital still cameras, video cameras and professional film equipment were used to encourage up to 30 participants to interact with the museum, its artefacts, the general public and with each other. The programme was designed to encourage participants to generate and use their own ideas for the content of a film illustrating their experiences of the museum. An evaluation of the pilot found that the people with the most complex needs engaged more with their surroundings and were more attentive in the museum than in other environments. The benefits for the more able participants were generally positive but less pronounced as it was difficult to separate the effect of attendances at the OIP sessions from the effects of experiences and activities in other areas of their lives.

A number of positive outcomes were identified by the evaluation of the pilot project: some people improved their ability to draw, paint and communicate, while all showed improved ‘mood’. Carers also noted an increase in social activity and a greater willingness to travel on public transport and use public amenities. Interaction with other people grew. Their ability to explore artefacts increased as people interacted with them and they explored the connections between themselves and the exhibits. This inspired dramatic interaction with artefacts (acting) and movement around and between objects and three-dimensional space. Cooperative working emerged, either in pairs – the camera operator and the subject – or as part of a larger group. People also learned to make group decisions, about editing for example, sharing interests in music and supplying musical ideas to be added to the film.

The pilot project raised awareness of the importance of non-verbal forms of communication for people with higher support needs. It was also an opportunity for people to learn about the cultural diversity of our heritage and experiencing ways of seeing from other cultural perspectives and interpreting them in a non-judgmental way. The participants were from various ethnic backgrounds and we were able to find some artefacts from all these backgrounds in the museum.’

How the evaluation of *Man & Machine* was carried out

The evaluation has been carried out by Dr Paul Swift an independent researcher who specialises in social inclusion for people with learning disabilities. His role has been one of ‘critical friend’ to the project, providing feedback to the project leader at regular intervals. He is also preparing a separate report on the implications of *Man & Machine* for local authority commissioners.

The evaluation sought to answer three principal questions about *Man & Machine*:

1. Did the project do what it set out to do? This is sometimes referred to as the ‘Ronseal’ test.
2. What was the impact of the project upon the different groups taking part or contributing to it?
3. What were the factors that helped and what were the factors that limited the conduct of the project?

¹ Hall, E. (2010) *Spaces of social inclusion and belonging for people with intellectual disabilities* Journal of Intellectual Disability Research, 54:1, 48-57

² Lemos, G. (2011) *Create-Ability: the changing meaning of art & artistry* London: City Bridge Trust p36

Evidence to support the evaluation was collected in several ways. Firstly, by attending and participating in a sample of the sessions and workshops run by OIP at the V&A and the Science Museum. This helped the evaluator understand how the project was delivered, to assess the quality of the artistic and educational content, and to monitor the impact of the project as it progressed. Secondly, interviews were carried out with the participants (where possible) their supporters, OIP staff and curatorial staff at the museums. Interviews were conducted on the basis that views and opinions would be used anonymously in the evaluation report. Thirdly, by reviewing film and photographic material generated during the project. Fourthly, by attending performances of the *Man & Machine* 'mini—opera' at the V&A and the Science Museums in January and February 2012 where members of the audience were asked for their reactions.

The main findings from the evaluation fall into four broad areas: the value of the artistic programme; the impact of the venues; the extent to which the project met the needs and aspirations of the participants; and the role and quality of the social care support available to them.

The artistic programme

The artistic programme for *Man & Machine* was well-structured, varied and coherent, with a clear rationale about the construction of artefacts and performances iterated throughout. Several audience members at the final performances (of the 'mini-opera') commented on how well the programme had been put together. The programme introduced participants to a range of new techniques, skills and experiences: using digital cameras (still and video), photo collage, designing set and costume maquettes, script-writing, choreography, dancing and singing. One of the features was the variety that it offered to participants, enabling each to try out and find activities that interested them. One of the OIP staff suggested that this 'trial and error' approach was the most appropriate way to introduce people with more severe disabilities people to new experiences. This was reflected in the testimony of some of the people supporting participants to attend the project:

"Some of the things they did he wasn't so interested in, but he loved the singing. It's worthwhile coming cos he looked forward to that so much". (Supporter)

"It is amazing how many different activities there are to do here. I didn't realise what these museums have to offer. It makes me think we should do more of this." (Supporter)

The evaluation also found evidence to support the contention that the programme was designed to ensure that the participants influenced the outputs of the project. During the early stages participants and supporters reported their enjoyment at selecting and reproducing images for inclusion in the collages and maquettes. The professional artists were impressed by the confidence of the group and their creativity during the song writing phase, and several audience members noted how the catalogue produced for the mini-opera clearly indicated the ownership of the event by the participants. As one OIP staff member put it:

"The way the project was constructed, each part of it, allows the group to put their take on the ideas so that the finished mini-opera is a distillation of all sorts of things that people have put in".

The project also confirmed Lemos's observation about the importance of high quality artistic input towards the success of such projects. Participants, their supporters, OIP staff and audiences all commended the role of the artists taking part:

"Her voice was amazing – fantastic, the way that it soared up into the gallery. So effective in here." (Audience member, V&A)

“This was such an opportunity because it ain’t often you get the chance to work with proper artists, and she’s a professional singer.” (Supporter)

“The best thing about this is the people here.” (Participant)

“The teachers and practitioners are all very accomplished in their fields although most have experience of working with people generally and people with learning disabilities. The relationship, the exchange, between them and the group has been fascinating.” (Member of OIP staff)

There was broad agreement that while the passage of the programme had not always been as smooth as anticipated - and the timetable had slipped - steady progress had been made from the initial scoping of artefacts at the two museums, recording and collating material, script development and use of various media and techniques ahead of the final performances of the mini-opera in January and February 2012.

The venues (V&A and The Science Museum)

Several of the supporters commented on the contrast between the stimulating environments of the V&A and the Science Museum compared to those experienced by participants in their normal daytime routine. Participants expressed enjoyment at spending time in the venues either verbally, with gestures, in their body language or through behaviours. Individuals were inspired by different exhibits and artefacts - the Diaghlev exhibition, Imperial Chinese robes, the flight simulators and so on – as well as the spaces such as the Energy Hall at The Science Museum. The V&A café was particularly appreciated as a good place to meet and take refreshments.

“This place (the V&A) is amazing. We, well I certainly get a buzz every time I come here. This lot must think it’s great”. (Supporter)

“Noisy! Too noisy for me, especially here in the café. I’m not sure about him; he doesn’t seem to mind, but it’s difficult to tell. There’s more space at the Science Museum. Perhaps he goes there at other times, I don’t know, but he gets excited there.” (Supporter)

“Here the group are in a situation where there are ordinary people who are interested in the museum: the quality of the museum and the interest of everybody else rubs off. People get absorbed by that. A bi-product of that is that people feel relaxed in this atmosphere. Two years on, people feel this (the museum) is a place they are very happy to be in.” (OIP staff member)

Many of the contributors to the evaluation made positive comments about how museum staff had worked actively to accommodate the group and ensure it was able to use all the facilities of the museum and to interact with the exhibits. OIP staff appreciated the respect and dignity shown to participants. This was exemplified by an incident during the first year of the programme when one of the participants found herself lost in the museum and security staff acted sensitively to reassure her and keep her safe. The OIP team have been able to negotiate with museum staff to overcome minor problems of using a busy public building to host this sort of initiative.

Managers with responsibility for equality and access issues at both the V&A and the Science Museum have welcomed *Man & Machine* as a practical illustration of how people with disabilities can be engaged creatively in the life of the institutions. They have complimented the drive and enthusiasm of the OIP team leader and had been impressed by the acclaim for previous productions

from the OIP team. Hosting the initiative was said to be good for staff morale and had provided an important opportunity to develop the museums' commitment to disability equality. OIP staff and audience members also commented upon the positive symbolism of the group performing the mini-opera during public open evenings at the two museums alongside a variety of other events.

Meeting the needs and aspirations of the participants

The timescale for a project involving people with a range of learning disabilities was well-judged to aid understanding and breed a spirit of cooperation and trust between the participants. The OIP staff were experienced in working with people with a range of intellectual impairments and appropriate communication techniques were used when working with the participants. Visiting artists had more varied expertise in working with people with learning disabilities, but adapted well to the needs of the group. The interim evaluation suggested that more individual work might need to be done with participants with particular needs, such as autism, which in the early stages of the project seemed to inhibit the contribution they were able to make within group settings. This point was addressed in the latter stages of the project. For example, one of the singers was particularly adept at including with a man with autism (P) in the preparation for the final performances, after which she commented:

“I've been amazed at how the group has developed over the last year or so. Look at P tonight; he sang every note. Even though he is often in the background at rehearsals, I know how much he wanted to do his solo tonight.” (Singer)

Attendance by participants was good throughout the project and those able to express an opinion reported a high level of interest at various points in the evaluation. Supporters and care staff for participants who were unable to express an opinion were more mixed in their assessment of the interest displayed by participants however. This seemed to reflect a lack of confidence amongst some support staff about their role in the activities pursued despite the efforts of OIP staff to induct and guide them during sessions, and some of the agency support staff were unfamiliar with the likes, preferences and wishes of the people they were supporting.

In the early stages of the project, many of the supporters were unsure about the artistic aspirations of participants; whether their motivation for taking part was driven by a desire to engage with the artistic activities offered by the programme or whether they simply enjoyed spending time away from their home area and their normal routines. The degree of disability affecting the participants seemed to inhibit some supporters' confidence in their potential to engage with the work. However, others noted that participants would display a range of emotions and reactions to the activities, often so small as to be indiscernible.

Key to understanding this was the supporters' knowledge of the person, close observational skills and experience of working with people with higher support needs. One described how one of the older participants could be easily overlooked as she tended not to volunteer much during sessions, preferring to stay in the background. To the casual observer this woman appeared to derive little benefit from her attendance at sessions, yet the supporter was able to detail subtle changes in her mood during her visits to the museums. The supporter had also followed through to assess the impact of the project upon this woman more generally and found that the project had become a highlight of her week and keenly anticipated. Similarly, a parent attending one of the final performances talked about the difficulty of gauging the impact of *Man & Machine* upon her daughter because of she liked to keep her activities private. Nevertheless, in the course of the preceding two years she had become aware of the sense of achievement that her daughter felt at reaching the milestone of performing the mini-opera:

“Although she wasn’t keen on us being here tonight, I’m proud of what she has done and wanted to see it come together.”

Audience members at the final performance were perhaps a more representative of those who know the participants well, including family members, friends, housemates and social care professionals. The verdict of this constituency was emphatically that the project had proved an overwhelmingly positive experience for those taking part.

“I’ve known her since she was a small girl and she was always a good singer. She has really come on in the last two years. She has spent so much time here that when we arrived it was ‘follow me’. Being here she is so relaxed, so much more confident.” (Family friend)

“I’m not sure how she first heard about this – it may have been (day centre). This is the first time I’ve been here, but I know how much she loves it. She gets really excited about coming.” (Residential care worker)

This was corroborated by the participants themselves who could all point to some aspect of the programme that they had particularly enjoyed:

“My favourite song? Snake in the peas!”

From the point of view of OIP staff, the major achievement of the project has been the progression of people’s skills and the growth in their confidence to take on new challenges. This was not simply a product of *Man & Machine*, but also a reflection of the trust and confidence built up between OIP staff and the participants over a long period of time.

“The difficulty at the beginning was knowing how far people would feel confident about performing and doing certain things. As is evident from what has gone on in the last three performances, it is something that people have really taken to – even those members of the group that are not that easy with it have joined in. Its encouraged a lot of people to do things they wouldn’t have done before.”

Social care support

The OIP staff team worked to enthuse and guide social care staff while in the V&A, but some agency staff appeared disengaged and disinterested in the project. Changes in support personnel also disrupted the continuity of the group’s work as new members of staff had to be inducted into the project work and the OIP coordinator was obliged to spend more time than anticipated dealing with issues relating to social care support for participants. However, during the course of the project OIP staff came to understand the qualities in social care support workers that are vital for this type of project – these included patience, attentiveness, creativity and the ability to work flexibly with individuals and groups. The OIP coordinator commented upon the excellent support provided by one supporter in particular and how her contribution had enhanced the experience of the project for participants. She also reported that *Man & Machine* had provided important learning points about the recruitment, retention and supervision of social care support for artistic projects.

Day services managers from Wandsworth Borough reviewed the project positively, believing it helps meet their targets for providing socially inclusive support to people with learning disabilities in the Borough in creative and meaningful ways. Some practical issues reduced the time available for group to pursue the artistic mission of the project, including inconsistent arrival and departure times of participants, lack of notification about non-attendance and problems with transport to and from the museum, and personal issues between members of the support staff. Moreover some residential

care providers did not regard supporting participation in *Man & Machine* as part of their remit. Two important consequences flowed from these practical issues: firstly, that the OIP team leader was often distracted from her primary task of delivering the artistic content of the programme, and secondly, sessions were truncated. Agreement has been reached to mount further performances of the mini-opera in Wandsworth so that more family, friends and other supporters are able to appreciate the participants' achievement.

Conclusions

Despite the overrun and the problems experienced in balancing the delivery of the artistic programme with the provision of the right social care support, *Man & Machine* is a positive model of social inclusion for people with learning disabilities. It has demonstrated how museums can stimulate and enthuse people who have been marginalised from mainstream cultural activities and thereby diversify their audiences. Key to the success of the project has been the role played by OIP in brokering the relationship between the participants in the project, the museums and professional artists. Good, clear programming allowed participants to try a range of creative activities and hone their skills. Above all the culmination of the project, in three public performances, clearly enhanced the self-confidence of those taking part. The project provided important learning about how social care support can best complement the artistic mission of such programmes and how individual supporters should be selected, trained and mentored to fulfil this role. Follow-up work by local authorities should ensure that the benefits of such projects are used to influence other aspects of participants' lives.

Paul Swift
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