



# NATIONAL LOTTERY PROGRESS REPORT 2023



## Difference NE

Changing perceptions of disability



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# INTRODUCTION

We have come to the end of the second year of our National Lottery funded project, **Delivering Difference**, as an award-winning organisation. Receiving the North East Charity award in autumn 2022 affirms our outstanding contribution to social change for Disabled people. We are also now a 'Carbon Literate' organisation, certified by The Carbon Literacy Trust as having met the requirements of the Carbon Literacy Standard, and we continue to find ways of lessening our impact on the planet. Delivering Difference is our 3-year strategic plan to deliver on our objective of changing perceptions of disability and tackling discrimination to make the North East a more equal place for Disabled people. Our 5 key strands of work, initially developed with Disabled people across our region, remain our steer; **Building Capacity; Research and Development; Voice, Influence, and Participation; Campaigning; and Training and Consultancy**. These strands are underpinned by our commitment to accessibility, inclusion, and the right to participate, for Disabled people, making sure that we have space at the tables where decisions are being made. We continue to strive to work in intersectional ways, reflecting on how we do things, and why. Nothing about us, without us.

**Nic Cook, Development Manager**

**Difference NE**

July 2023

## BUILDING CAPACITY

In employing two new members to our team in May, we developed a new accessible and inclusive approach to recruitment which was experimental yet informed by our learning from our ongoing 'Disability at Work' project'. We designed two new roles based on our growing working needs, and appointed Elgan John (Communications and Content Coordinator) and Beatrice Groves-McDaniel (Campaigns and Training Coordinator).

Our reach on social media and other new-to-us platforms of communicating and collaborating have grown, allowing us to connect more widely with other DPO's and Disabled people in our region. Particularly, we have been able to widen our communication across the North East, whereby a lot of engagement in the previous year was Newcastle/Gateshead/Northumberland focused, we have strengthened links across South Tyneside, Sunderland, Teesside, and Durham. Elgan also has lots of experience in successfully organising community action for social change, allowing us to develop more in-person work with our community.

Bea has a plethora of experience in the education sector, working in mainstream and community settings with Disabled people. She has been developing a learning plan for Difference's training offer (see page ....) which has been updated and enriched.

We also appointed Nic Cook as our new Development Manager, in March 2022. Nic has been with Difference for over 2 years in changing and dynamic roles and continues to develop and implement the Delivering Difference project. Difference has recommitted itself to finding ways of working with Disabled staff that work for them, providing meaningful and flexible work, to facilitate powerful representation of Disabled people in the workforce of the North East.



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**NORTH EAST CHARITY AWARDS**

HEADLINE SPONSOR

**BREWIN DOLPHIN**

ASSOCIATE SPONSORS

**VONNE**

**OUTSTANDING CONTRIBUTION TO SOCIAL CHANGE**

**WINNER**

**Difference North East**

# RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

Difference conducts, commissions, and collaborates in research and development activity to inform our work and support our strategic goals.

## In 2022-2023 we:

- Worked with Dr Christopher Hartworth on a study to inform to how Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council could become a more disability inclusive borough. This study gained insights into the barriers Disabled people face in living healthy lifestyles.
- Partnered with a Disabled PhD researcher at Durham University. This research challenges the notions that Disabled People are lacking skills, and media portrayals of skill as 'overcoming' our impairments. This study centres Disabled people's experiences and life stories and will help inform public attitudes towards Disabled people, and our work at Difference.
- Facilitated a participatory action research day at our 'Disability at Work Summit' in summer 2022, with an ongoing action research group. This group of Disabled and non-disabled stakeholders has developed a Disability Employment Resource Hub to support employers and Disabled staff in making recruitment and employment work in inclusive ways for Disabled people. Good practice in building an inclusive employment culture for Disabled people, defined by the group, has also been used to inform our Inclusive Employment training workshop.

- Involved members in consultative/focus groups to gather views and experiences on matters such as active travel, accessible transport, and inclusive activism. Responses from these inform our campaigning priorities.



# VOICE, INFLUENCE, AND PARTICIPATION

## Member Events



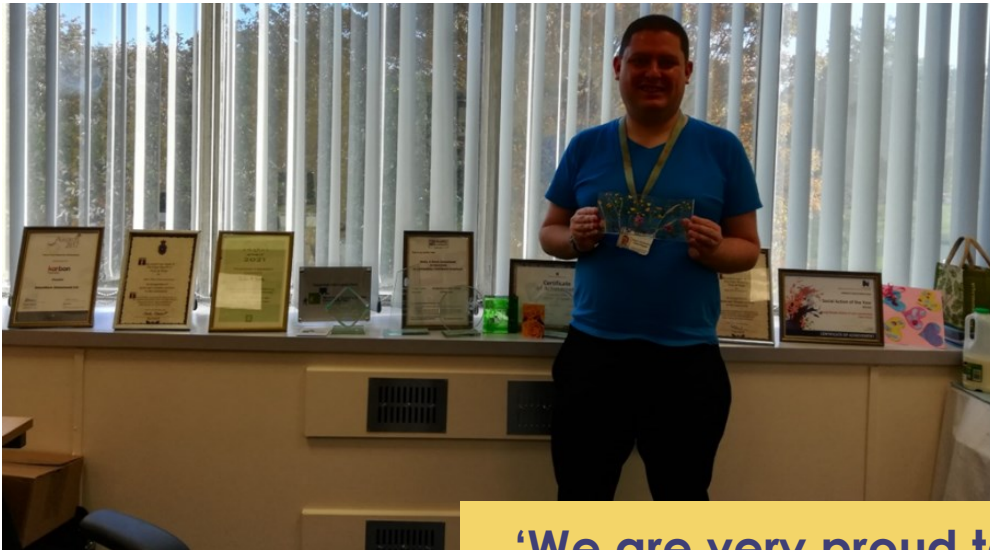
Difference members and award winners celebrating with Jenni Pascoe's slam poetry. Skilfully BSL interpreted by the extraordinary Sue from Becoming Visible.

## Difference Awards

In the autumn, we ran our first Difference Awards. We had a great response to a callout for nominations for folks who had made real change for Disabled People in the region. The Board of Trustees formed our judging panel and the 4 winners; a welfare rights campaigner supporting Disabled people to navigate the benefits system; a festival producer committed to making music and the arts accessible in the North East; a charity founder supporting young people with Learning Disabilities into employment; and a Difference ally committed to equality and inclusion in their work, convened at an online ceremony. We were joined by Difference member and Performance Poet, Jenni Pascoe, with much hilarity.



Difference Award Winner with their award, designed by North East artist and Disability Rights Campaigner Judith Gill



**‘We are very proud to have received this award that recognises our commitment to accessibility and inclusiveness for Disabled people.’**

## **Human Rights, and a Rights-based approach**

We hosted an event in October called ‘Disability and Human Rights: Whose Rights are they anyway?’ with the [British Institute of Human Rights](#) and Just Fair. Together, we spoke about the barriers that exclude disabled people from participating and how we might use a rights-based approach to address systemic injustices, like poverty and lack of access to services and resources, which disproportionately impact upon Disabled people’s lives, especially in the North East. This event was attended by 20 members and non-members and has impacted the way

in which we take an intersectional approach to thinking about our work and how we can continue to challenge those responsible for removing such barriers. This work has also extended into a project with Just Fair where we have co-produced a game with other community researchers in social justice organisations, that supports Disabled people to learn about, talk about, and claim their rights (see 'Campaigning' for more information).

### **Disabled Climate Action Forum (DCAF)**

We have continued to run our Disabled Climate Action Forum (DCAF) events, which have gained in momentum and attendance. Likewise, DCAF has become a place of climate knowledge, and we have been consulted by several organisations, including Local Authorities and the Carbon Literacy Trust, on how to make climate learning, and net-zero actions and policies inclusive and accessible for Disabled people. We have held several forums this year, with an average 18 participants, to gather Disabled and non-disabled people to fight climate injustice, develop inclusive and accessible ways of doing climate action together, and co-create information on the climate crisis that is accessible. Our most recent forum was co-facilitated by Ben from [Wheels for Wellbeing](#) on inclusive cycling as part of wider Active Travel plans. This was attended by Transport North East and Active Travel England, whom we have been able to have strategic conversations with regarding regional plans for inclusive cycling infrastructure. Our members were also in attendance and helped devise a project to make sure Disabled people in the North East have voice and influence on decisions made about climate action and the climate crisis (See 'Training').

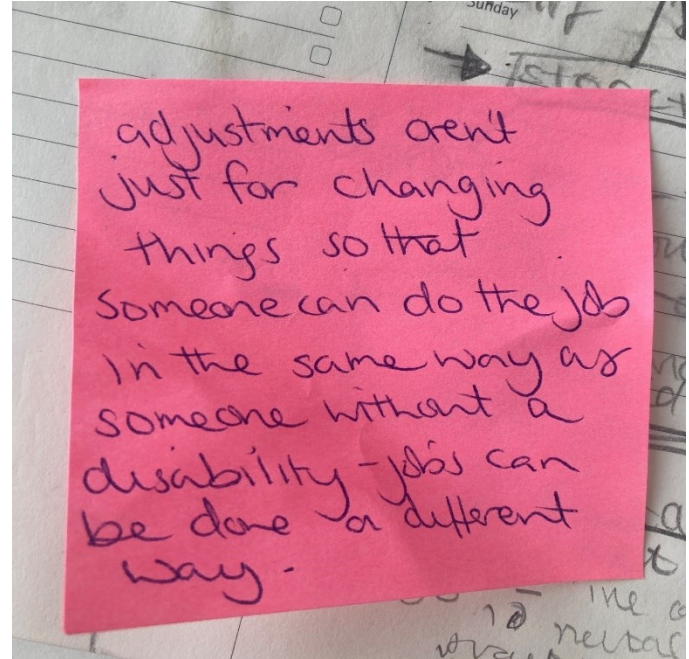
## Disability Pride

This July, we celebrated Disability Pride by emphasising our commitment to taking intersectional approaches to our Disability Rights work. We held an online event called 'What's it like to be Transgender AND Disabled?' Disability Pride means different things to different people, for us, it's an opportunity to celebrate difference whilst highlighting the barriers that exist for Disabled people. This event spotlighted the spectrum of experiences and identities we have as Disabled people and allowed us to explore how we can continue to feed wider and more representative experiences of Disabled people into our work.

We continue to seek opportunities to explore the intersections of race, gender, sex, sexual orientation and other protected characteristics and identities, centring the experiences of those who live these identities.

## Disability at Work

In Summer last year, we held our Disability at Work Summit which brought together over 50 stakeholders in a hybrid online/in-person summit to explore the barriers to inclusive employment. This included many Disabled members, local businesses, Local Authorities, the Shadow Minister for Disabled People, NHS staff and leaders, and academics and researchers. Out of this stemmed a working group who have met regularly over the past year to develop and implement strategies to develop an inclusive employment culture in the region. You can read more in the Campaigning section below.



Some feedback from participants in our Disability at Work Summit



## Changing Places

The Star and Shadow cinema in Newcastle fundraised for a Changing Places toilet this year and we were invited to help unveil it. Alongside performances by Disabled artists and Difference members, we helped cut the ribbon to a hugely important addition for the Disabled community in the North East.



Performers and Difference members at the opening of Star and Shadow Changing Places Facility

## **Intersectionality**

We continue to seek opportunities to explore the intersections of race, gender, sex, sexual orientation and other protected characteristics and identities, centring the experiences of those who live these identities. This year we have developed relationships with a wider diversity of organisations that are representative of marginalised communities, such as those working towards racial and intersectional equality for Disabled people, and those working with Ethnically marginalised women in Tyne and Wear- finding ways we can support each-others work and collaborate.

## **Allies Network**

At the start of 2022 we launched a new form of membership. Our Allies Network was set up to encourage organisations and freelancers who want to support our work. We have grown this membership to 55 organisations who have pledged to challenge ableism and broaden representations of disability in their work. An example of this in practice includes Transport North East working with us to enhance their image library to include disabled people using public transport and across their Active Travel strategy communications. Another of our Allies, a Local Authority, has purchased our Inclusive Employment workshop to be run several times across the organisation, as a direct result of engaging with us through the Allies Network.



## Consultations, Participation, and Partnerships

We have been active both in speaking up for the rights of Disabled people and in providing opportunities for accessible and inclusive participation in spaces and places that Disabled people can make their voices heard.

- Partnered with North of Tyne Combined Authority and VONNE in supporting the Equalities Assembly in Autumn 2022.
- We submitted evidence from case studies, reports and data, outlining the key barriers faced by Disabled people in the North East.
- Consulted on best practice for developing an inclusive and accessible 'Lived Experience Advisory Board' with Rights organisation Just Fair. This work, though seen as radical and somewhat risky, has led to such a board being implemented, making space at the table for Disabled people to influence Just Fair's work.
- Worked with Wheels for Wellbeing, a DPO that campaigns for inclusive cycling, to submit a powerful response to Transport North East's 'Active Travel Strategy'. This challenged the strategy to make further changes to infrastructure, language, and implementation of plans. We have developed alliances with Transport North East and Active Travel England with whom we will work to make sure plans work for Disabled people.

- Helped shape the North East and North Cumbria (NENC) Engagement and Involvement Strategy ensuring Disabled voices are heard when the NENC Integrated Care Board is setting priorities and making decisions. We continue to play an active role as a member of the NENC Learning and Improvement Community. We also fed into the draft People Strategy.
- Partnered with Inclusion North and Disability North to demand that Integrated Care Board Consultation process, for addressing health inequalities, was made accessible for Disabled people to take part.
- Consulted on a project with Cumbria, Northumberland, Tyne and Wear NHS Trust (CNTW), working in partnership with their Disabled Staff Network, to elaborate a toolkit to help managers know exactly what they are expected to do when an employee asks for reasonable adjustments, and to assist Disabled staff in knowing how and what to do. The toolkit will also make sure managers are engaged and supportive during processes and implementation of adjustments.
- Spoke at the Academic Health Sciences Network digital inclusion forum to stress the need for better performance to start addressing health inequalities for Disabled people.
- Contributed to a meeting with a Local Authority seeking more accessible public toilets.

# CAMPAIGNING

We have streamlined our Campaigning activity to fit under 3 strands, from emerging a clearer theory of change at a team away day in February 2023. The 3 below headings outline what we have been doing for each of those strands.

## **Accessible Cities**

We continue to regularly meet with local councillors about city redevelopment plans. In part as a result of much pressure from Difference, about the inaccessibility of not only the consultation process but also some of the strategy, plans were halted and have since been partly redesigned.

## **Climate action and Climate Justice**

After starting our Disabled Climate action Forum back in 2021, it has grown to be one of the largest attended campaigns. We believe this reflects the intersecting effects of the climate crisis of social and economic barriers faced by disabled people. Likewise, Disabled people are rarely included in climate action decision-making.

- We have used our DCAF group and our learning from our forums, to put pressure on local authorities to reconsider their Net-Zero policies through an accessibility and inclusion lens. Of impact, has been our input into the Active Travel Strategy, whom we have met with multiple times to influence infrastructure plans.

- The forum has begun to co-develop a program of learning that will help organisations who deliver climate literacy learning, to make sure their content is accessible and inclusive, and address disproportionate impact that climate breakdown has on Disabled people.

## Transport

- We've fought back against government-backed plans for sweeping closures of ticket offices across England. We worked with the RMT union to hand out leaflets and raise awareness of the consultation on the closures. Pressure from DPO's has resulted in an extension of the deadline of the closure. We have also submitted objections to all local train companies, as well as a national response.
- We met with Disabled people to hear their experiences and concerns around new Transport strategies in our region, including the Active Travel Strategy, which includes challenging the council's decision to develop cycleways that are dangerous to Disabled, particularly visually impaired and Blind, people. We met with residents in Heaton who are opposing cycle lane plans which stop Disabled and elderly people parking, safely crossing the road and safely accessing bus stops there.

## Housing

- We are part of the Homes for Us campaign with the New Economics Foundation (NEF), to develop ways we can take action

to win accessible social housing. We have been talking to members of our community on the problems they face in accessing housing that is suitable to their needs and of a good standard. These conversations will inform a series of short films interviews that we can use to raise awareness and put pressure on local authorities.

- We interviewed a North East based artist and activist about their work on homelessness, housing, and disability which we used to raise awareness of the disability housing crisis in the UK.
- Likewise, NEF will be collaborating with us in building community power and voice in the process of devolution of powers and resources to combined authorities here in the North East.

## **Disability Poverty and Social Justice**

### **Health and Wellbeing**

- We have collaborated with the WinVisible to support the Disabled Mothers Charter of Rights which sets out 5 demands to stop social workers and the family courts removing children from Disabled mothers instead of providing the support. It is couched in wider discussions of the lack of visibility of Disabled Mothers rights in wider disability campaign work and we have been working with them to raise awareness and gather experiences from the North East.
- We are a member of the HAREF Allies Network, which represents the needs of ethnically marginalised communities in the North East-

focussing on Health Inequalities. We attended the bi-annual meeting earlier this year and have committed to being more involved working on Digital Accessibility in a Health and Care context.

## **Digital Inclusion**

To tackle digital exclusion, we continue to facilitate our Digital Accessibility workshops with various organisations across the region (see 'Training and Consultancy' for more details). We are also a member of the Digital Poverty Alliance which is a national initiative that fights against digital poverty by raising awareness.

## **Poverty and the Cost-of-Living Crisis**

- We are part of the Disability Poverty Campaign Group, led by DRUK and Inclusion London to develop a proposal for a parliamentary enquiry into disability-related poverty. The collective aims to inform, challenge and campaign for action to help Disabled people in the face of increasing poverty as a result of fuel and food costs.
- We have been embedding a rights-based approach when challenging local authorities and other rights bearers on disability-related poverty, making sure that decision-makers take an intersectional view not only in terms of identity and multiple layers of disadvantage, but also at the interrelation of economic, social and cultural barriers that Disabled people face.



- We have co-developed a game with human rights organisations to enable Disabled people to learn about, discuss, and claim their economic, social, and cultural rights as set out in the International Covenant of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). This game will be launched during London Challenge Poverty Week with Amnesty International and [ATD Fourth World](#). We piloted this



Cards from the Human Rights game, co-developed with Just Fair and others. with small group of our members and will be using the game to facilitate conversations and to co-develop campaign strategies.

## Employment and Inclusive Workplaces

### Resource Hub

One of the key barriers that our Disability at Work action research group identified was inaccessible recruitment and selection practices and policies. Participants told us they often experience discrimination at work, and that employers need to work differently if they want to attract and recruit Disabled people. From this we developed our [Disability at Work Resource Hub](#) which is an archive of useful information, guidance and practical tips to help make organisations more inclusive for Disabled employees.

- We are members of the Integrated Care Board Community of Practice where we have been able to feed in our work around building inclusive employment cultures for Disabled employees.
- We are also members of the NENC Partnership Programme Workforce Sub-group that meets to emerge and challenge the issues faced by the North East NHS workforce through integration and two-way communication with the VCSE sector.

# TRAINING AND CONSULTANCY

An important way in which Difference raises awareness, changes attitudes, and promotes greater inclusion is through our training and consultancy work. This year, our training has travelled to all sorts of places, including local councils, housing management associations, NHS Trusts, arts and cultural organisations, and a UNESCO Global Geopark!

Our training offer this year expanded to include our Inclusive Employment workshop we have facilitated with a Local Authority and have further bookings with businesses for the coming year.

- We have facilitated over 56 sessions of our Disability Equality, Awareness and Etiquette workshop. 36 of these were for a Local Authority, where 457 employees across all levels of the organisation participated.
- 75% of participants said they would change the language they use when talking about disability and to or about Disabled people. Many said they wanted to learn more about hidden disabilities and how to make their work for inclusive and accessible in practical ways, which is reflected in our Inclusive Employment and Digital Accessibility workshops.
- The other 20 were with an NHS Trust, with feedback like 'a brilliant interactive session, very informative and I have already recommended this to my colleagues' and 'They are definitely

needed and very helpful. Nic and Chris, you did a great job at making a complex and difficult topic informative and very interesting.'

- Inclusion North invited us to facilitate a team learning day on the social model of disability and embedding that in practice.
- We worked with the North Pennines AONB to explore how local hospitality businesses could improve the experiences of Disabled people visiting the sites there and have continued to work with them exploring the development of 'access guides' and how they can be made more effective.
- We delivered several digital accessibility workshops with VCSE organisations, and with the North East Family Arts Network, helping them to practice digital accessibility across their communications on websites, social media, and in online meetings and events.
- We developed and delivered a new shorter session on Creating Accessible Social Media Content via the Digital Pathfinders Programme (VONNE). We hope to offer this more widely in a similar way to our other Digital Accessibility workshops.

Training has continued to become an income stream for us and with the employment of our new Training and Campaigns coordinator, we have begun developing more bespoke workshops based on feedback from our previous sessions. These include more focus on particular issues, like understanding and representing hidden or unseen disabilities, as well as understanding intersectional approaches to disability equality.



Participants in a Digital Accessibility workshop online

## A Learning Organisation

We have also invested in our development as a learning organisation, allowing us to surface where new skills and ideas are needed and how we can create a thriving ecosystem that is people-led- making sure that we can deliver on changing perceptions of disability and dismantling discrimination. Some of this work has looked like emerging our Theory of Change with a social change leadership developer. It has also taken the form of team learning sessions, where we have begun to unpack and reflect on our commitment to access and inclusion. Challenging

ourselves to practice what we preach, develop intersectional awareness as an organisation, and becoming actively anti-racist, and anti-discrimination of any kind. This has also involved exploring ways in which we can develop our board of trustees to diversify and better fully reflect the experiences of Disabled people in our region, including those with experience of having their social, economic, and cultural rights denied.