

Journal Article

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Original Research

An “Afterthought”: Investigating Barriers to Arts Engagement for Disabled People in Wrexham, North Wales

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Abstract: In November 2021, a research report was published authored by On the Move and commissioned by the British Council called Time to Act, which focused on arts engagement by disabled people in Europe. The report evidenced the lack of accessibility in the arts for disabled individuals and low confidence among arts organizations in including disabled people in their activities and events. In total, 48% of respondents were not very/at all confident in the accessibility of artistic programs for disabled people. The report also demonstrated insufficient consideration of disabled people in the planning and facilitation of arts events or programs. This article, based on our 2025 Arts in Society conference presentation, details our research into how these findings relate to Wrexham specifically. Through creating community links within Wrexham, holding public forums, and creating an online survey, we have formed an overview of how the arts are perceived within the area, by disabled communities and individuals. This article articulates the development of a network of third-party collaborators who have an enriched knowledge and understanding of the arts community in Wrexham in relation to disability and community arts, such as The Wrexham Miner’s Project (Art4All) and Emerge Community Arts. Through this research, we examine the challenges and identify possible ways forward in enabling local arts venues, event organizers, creative practitioners, and policy makers to utilize sustainable approaches to the perspectives of disabled people in Wrexham, with the aim of enabling arts engagement.

Keywords: *Disability, Arts Accessibility, Community Engagement, Emancipatory Research, Qualitative Research*

Introduction

The research project detailed in this article was originally conceived in May 2024 by Dr. Grace Thomas, who is Senior Research Fellow in Arts Engagement at Wrexham University. Thomas is also a disabled artist, with lived experience of mobility disorders, chronic pain, neurodivergence, and mental health. The research was supported and supervised by Professor Alec Shepley who is Associate Dean for Research and Professor of Arts and Society at Wrexham University. The research was designed to investigate and examine the barriers to arts engagement within the local community, using a mixed-methods approach, with the long-term aim of creating accessible and high-impact arts provision and opportunities for those with disabilities.

The term “disabled people” has been used based on advice from Disability Wales (Day et al. 2026). When defining disability, the Equality Act 2010 describes it as having “physical or mental impairment” that has a “substantial” and “long-term” negative effect on your ability to do normal daily activities” (2010). The project was structured in four stages:

- to make links with local charities, community groups, and community resources in Wrexham;
- to conduct forums with disabled individuals to discuss their experienced and perceived barriers to arts activities, both as audience and participant;
- to produce a program of arts workshops and events based on the findings of the forums;
- to collate a list of questions and demands from the disabled community in Wrexham addressed to arts companies, venues, and practitioners in the local area, in the form of a manifesto and presentation.

This article will detail the first two stages of the project that have been completed, including the conceptualization and development of the project, the methods utilized in conducting the research, and the outcomes of the work. The article has been written to ensure that its contextual information, methodology, and data findings are accessible to readers with varying levels of knowledge and experience on the topic, in line with the project’s inclusionary ethos. To evaluate this research fully, the rationale and context of the project will be explored first.

Rationale

This project originated from a research report published in November 2021 by On the Move, commissioned by the British Council. The report, entitled *Time to Act*, focused on arts engagement and disabled people in Europe. The report evidenced a lack of accessibility in the arts for disabled individuals and a lack of confidence in arts environments. In total, 48% of participants in the research were not very or at all confident in the accessibility of artistic programming for disabled people (2021). The report also demonstrated the lack of consideration regarding disabilities when planning and facilitating arts events or programs. For example, 87% of arts venues and events who participated in the study did not provide accessible marketing materials such as large print and audio descriptions (2021), and only 12% offered an accessible booking process such as including screen readers and simplified seating plans (2021). The report led to an initial inquiry into how these statistics were reflected within Wrexham. Wrexham is a city within North Wales in the United Kingdom. It has a population of 135,100 (as recorded in the most recent census in 2021). The city faces long-term socio-economic deprivation, including small areas of deep-rooted deprivation (Welsh Government 2025). This includes growing unemployment and increasing levels of unpaid care (20–50+ hours a week) being provided to disabled and elderly individuals (Office for National Statistics 2023a).

Another consideration when designing the project was the intersecting issues of poverty and social deprivation that impact arts engagement for disabled people, with disabled people disproportionately living within poverty. The Cultural Learning Alliance's 2025 report demonstrates an ongoing correlation and increased issue between poverty and the arts, indicating that within education "arts take-up is lowest where deprivation levels are highest" (Ramaiah 2025, 3). This correlation coincides with the discernible need for arts and culture in poor communities. A 2021 study by University College London, showed that those living in the poorest areas within England "benefit the most from cultural engagement," specifically regarding "life satisfaction, mental distress and mental health functioning" (Jowett 2021).

Poverty and disability are closely linked within the UK, with the Joseph Rowntree Foundation reporting that in the UK during 2023 "the poverty rate for disabled people was 30%, 10 percentage points higher than the rate for people who were not disabled" (2025). This percentage rises to 32% within Wales specifically. These statistics led to a further examination of disability, the arts, and how this relates to Wrexham.

Context

A key piece of context for this research is the growing negative rhetoric and increase in harmful governmental policies regarding disabled people in the UK; one example is former British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's 2024 speech that referred to increased disability in the country as "sick note culture" that the Disability Poverty Campaign Group described as "stigmatising, harmful, and inaccurate" (Pring 2024). Also in 2024, a local council in England drew criticism for stating children with additional educational needs (such as those with autism or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) were "just really badly behaved" (Nevett 2024).

The UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2024 report found that since 2016 UK governments have frequently used "rhetoric that devalues disabled people and undermines their human dignity" (2024, 74). This rhetoric has become increasingly unsympathetic toward disabled people with mental health and invisible disabilities, which are often treated with cynicism and mockery. Disabled activist Dermot Devlin stated in 2025 that "public opinion is getting nasty towards disabled people" and that he has "never felt more pushed away from being a member of society" (Murray 2025). Proposed changes to the benefits system for disabled people were described by Mikey Erhardt, a campaigner at Disability Rights UK, as "brutal and reckless" while Paralympic champion Tanni Grey-Thompson, said the changes "could push people who are currently just about surviving into greater poverty or more need" (Murray 2025).

When focusing on Wales and Wrexham, recent data shows that Wales has a higher percentage of disabled people than the rest of the UK and a higher proportion of disability benefit claimants (Office for National Statistics 2023b). Disabled people in Wales also face a higher employment gap and, when in employment, a bigger wage gap than in other parts of

the UK (Senedd Cymru 2025). In Wrexham specifically, there is a higher percentage of disabled people in comparison to other counties in North Wales (such as Flintshire, Conwy, and Gwynedd) and higher levels of disabilities that limit daily activities substantially (Office for National Statistics 2023b). In relation to arts and disability in Wales, arts engagement is also impacted by the reduction in creative opportunities. Since 2017, arts funding across the UK has been subject to significant cuts, with the highest reduction in Wales at 30% (Equity 2024). The disability community in Wales has voiced that policy and research frequently do not manifest into practical, demonstrable solutions or change. In Disability Arts Cymru's 2021 manifesto, focus groups felt that work such as the Arts Council of Wales and The National Museum of Wales' Widening Engagement report (2021) was "failing to translate into meaningful or positive actions" (2021, 10). The manifesto also detailed how the resources needed to engage with the arts were not provided to disabled people, with focus group contributors relaying how they "were told their needs cannot be met, and a few deaf people were often informed interpreters would not be provided for one off shows or participation activities" (2021, 10).

A contributing factor to inaccessibility is the financial challenges faced by venues and organizations that do not receive funding for building adjustments (especially older buildings), to purchase accessibility equipment or pay for staff training on accessibility (Leahy and Ferri 2024).

As well as engaging with the arts as audience members or participants, Disability Arts Cymru's manifesto also indicated that careers in the arts are difficult for disabled people to develop, with barriers including "lack of opportunities within education; lack of understanding of access needs; inaccessible funding portals; lack of understanding of the lived experience of disability or in a constant refusal to change cultures that directly exclude them" (2021, 13).

A key aspect of current disability studies and disability activism is the promotion and utilization of the social model of disability, rather than the historically used medical model. In February 2025, Thomas was invited to an Experts Forum on Disability in Wales by the Learned Society of Wales. This forum was attended by researchers, charities, and health workers who were all working with different areas of disability in Wales. This event led to the inclusion of the social model of disability in the project following a presentation from Disability Wales on the topic. The medical model of disability is focused on rehabilitation and frames health conditions as a "problem." Disability is seen as a disadvantage. This shapes how people see themselves and are seen by others, leading to internalized negative messages and subconscious microaggressions (Day et al. 2026).

The social model of disability sees the label of disability as imposed on individuals through their environment. Society creates barriers through its attitudes, policies, and the construction of facilities and/or resources. This research has been influenced by the social model of disability, as it promotes centering disabled people in the creation of arts initiatives/approaches, offering their lived experience to formulate outcomes. The growing

promotion of the social model of disability by various organizations (including Disability Arts Cymru and Transport for All), shows progress in how disability is discussed and perceived, counteracting the negative rhetoric witnessed in the UK. The research design was influenced by this social, economic, and political context in mind, utilizing suitable and effective research methods that were grounded within appropriate theoretical frameworks.

Influences, Challenges, and Approaches

The first stage of the project was to create a database of local arts organization that work with people with disabilities and other relevant contacts within the community. Community engagement can be defined as building connections that create and develop positive and productive relationships between individuals, groups, institutions, and organizations in the local area and/or specific demographic (Mulroy 2004). While a community-based approach has a basis within social work (Weil 1996) it can be (and has been) applied to arts practice and arts research, with the goal of providing the benefits of arts engagement to communities, such as reducing depression and chronic pain (Frontier Economics 2024).

To increase engagement with the disabled arts community in Wrexham, a network of local artists, charitable organizations, and local activists was formulated. The network included:

- Emerge Community Arts who provide creative workshops in music, theater, and craft-based opportunities for those with learning disabilities (2025).
- Wrexham Miner's Project who run their Art4All sessions with disabled people and their carers (2024), as well as creating art exhibitions and community arts events.
- Nathan Lee Davies—a local disability activist and writer.
- Groups such as STAND (Stronger Together for Additional Needs and Disabilities) North Wales and the Dementia Friends Art Group.

Based on the positive feedback from initial discussions within this network, qualitative research methods such as public forums and online surveys emerged as suitable methods of data collection. The concept of community forums within this project is influenced by the theory of Action Research, utilizing research methods that interact with local communities on the issues that affect their lives, utilizing Social Science approaches. Within Action Research, "research problems are chosen based on the issues that are pertinent in the local context, and efforts are launched to concretely solve these problems directly and to evaluate the adequacy of the outcomes and the analytical understandings arrived at" (2007, 53). The participants we would work with would be asked to identify the issues affecting them, evaluate what was already being done to counteract these issues, and propose the next steps that could be taken to solve the challenges they face. Emancipatory Research influenced the project also, as the research aimed to empower and elevate the lived experiences of disabled people. Emancipatory research can be defined as, "the systematic demystification of the structures and processes which create

disability and the establishment of a workable dialogue between the research community and disabled people in order to facilitate the latter's empowerment" (Barnes 1992, 122). This methodology acknowledges that discrimination and exclusion toward disabled people is systemic and is intrinsically built-in to all facets of society, including research. Emancipatory research prioritizes the voices of disabled people to center them within research and by altering prior research dynamics enables an equitable dialogue between researcher and participant. To enable this dialogue and emancipation of the participant, the unequal positions between the researcher and the participant must be addressed, to help ensure the accuracy and effectiveness of any research outcomes—comfortable, empowered participants are more likely to provide detailed, honest answers. Within University and community-based collaborative research "how the partnership is set up, resourced and facilitated, and how imbalances of power are dealt with, affect the outcomes achieved" (Kearney and Candy 2004, 181). Mixed or contrasting motivations and desired outcomes within a collaboration (as well as the conscious or subconscious assumptions/associations the researcher and participants may have about one another) can make a truly collaborative approach difficult to achieve (McDonald 2021). The positionality of the researcher in relation to the demographic participating in the research can position that researcher as an "insider or outsider" (Holmes and Darwin 2020, 6). If the researcher is seen as having no lived experience within the social or cultural context of the participating demographic, it can cause reticence and caution during interviews and focus group discussions (Yip 2023).

Thomas' positionality had both a positive and negative impact on this. When approaching this research area, Thomas' experiences could position her as an "insider," making participants feel more comfortable sharing their experiences in the forums. However, this lived experience could also influence how Thomas discussed these issues in the forums. With this in mind, the questions asked in the forums were carefully constructed to avoid influencing participants' answers or encourage/enable Thomas to project her own opinions. When creating the forum questions, we asked Anna Davies from Emerge Community Arts for her feedback and suggestions, based on her professional experience within disability arts. We also decided that these questions would be a "launching pad" for discussion rather than a set agenda for each forum. This decision was to further enable and empower participants to dictate the issues that needed to be addressed and to build a mutually respectful relationship between researcher and participant. The position of "outsider" for the researcher will manifest through the researcher's design "if outcomes are prescribed in a rigid manner" as "this will influence the collaboration process" (Kearney and Candy 2004, 181). A prescribed and pre-emptive approach may inspire cynicism, distrust, and disengagement from the project.

When facilitating the forums, Thomas needed to be responsive and reactive in her approach to fully enable the participants to share their perspective. Working with disabled individuals within research can also complicate ethical considerations of consent and awareness of the project's purpose, with the mental capacity of participants highly varied

depending on the nature and severity of their impairment/s (Boettcher et al. 2022). In contrast, researchers need to be aware of subconscious, well-intentioned infantilizations of disabled people that inadvertently disempower individuals (Robey et al. 2006).

Emerge Community Arts and the Wrexham Miner's Project acted as collaborators, working as co-facilitators and assisting in recruiting participants, in line with the project's Action Research methodology. One benefit to these collaborations with community groups is that the regular attendees of these groups' arts sessions were well known to the staff co-facilitating the forums, including their individual needs. Therefore, guidance can be offered to researchers from these community group facilitators on any additional needs of participants such as if a carer will be present, if wheelchairs or mobility aids will need to be catered for, or if assistance will be required for signing consent forms. Another benefit to collaboration such as these is the preexisting relationship between individuals and facilitators. These relationships form a sense of trust and a relaxed rapport, making discussion easier to start and maintain. Enabling participants to attend in-person through providing an accessible venue and/or offered digital alternatives to create flexibility was a practical and methodological consideration during planning. Enabling participant attendance from multiple perspectives is a key component of Emancipatory Research, empowering disabled people to engage with research and the opportunity to have their lived experiences shared.

Six in-person forum sessions were planned and conducted—three with Emerge Arts at the University of Wrexham campus and three with Wrexham Miner's Project at their existing arts space. These sessions were spread across March, April, and May 2025 with participants invited to attend as many sessions as they would like. This provided flexibility regarding participants' availability, any health-related issues that may impact physical attendance, and their carer's availability. It also provided participants with the opportunity to reflect on their answers and, if attending more than one forum, consider any talking points they may want to present at future forums. At the University, we were supported in finding accessible spaces for the forums, with access to ramps and doorframes wide enough for wheelchair users. As the Wrexham Miner's Project's space is already used as an arts space for disabled people, it had the required accessibility for disabled people to attend. To increase accessibility, a survey was created that included the same project information, consent form, and list of questions that would be used at the in-person forums. Both Emerge Community Arts and the Wrexham Miner's Project advised the survey would be useful for those who were unable to attend the forums in-person, due to illness or their dependency on their carer's availability. It also counteracted the arguably "emic" aspect of using forum techniques (Stewart and Shamdasani [1990] 2010, 13), opening the discussion to participants outside the sub-groups created by the community arts organizations. Using a mixed-methods approach such as this "can mean a study becomes more inclusive and as a result provides a more comprehensive analysis of the experiences of all disabled people" (Farmer and Macleod 2011, 40). The survey ensured

accessibility through key principles such as using clear, simple language and ensuring high contrast between the text and the background.

Forum Facilitation and Outcomes

The forums were attended by eighty-seven people with seventeen participants attending three sessions. Those who attended varied in age from 18 years old to individuals in their 70s, with the following demographic percentages:

- 18–25 years old: 8%
- 26–35 years old: 13%
- 36–45 years old: 15%
- 46–55 years old: 25%
- 56–65 years old: 31%
- 65+ years old: 10%

The type and severity of disability also varied, with a range of physical or mobility-based disabilities (32%) and learning disabilities/neurodivergence (68%). The gender of participants was fairly evenly split in general (47% female and 53% male) but with two sessions attended by slightly more male individuals (60%), who were aged 50 to 70 years. The questions used to inspire discussion were:

- What do you enjoy about the arts and what arts projects/events/groups have you been involved in?
- Have you ever had a bad experience with the arts, e.g., attending an event?
- What positive experiences have you had with the arts and what made them positive?
- What do you wish arts venues and arts companies knew when it came to accessibility for disabled people?
- What ambitions or hopes for the future do you have—would you like to be an actor or a scriptwriter for example?
- What kind of arts events and opportunities would you like to see in Wrexham?

The approach for the forums was to create a welcoming space, with refreshments available, and the sessions characterized as an informal chat. While the participants were fully informed that the forums were part of a wider research project and had to sign thoroughly written consent forms, the tone of the sessions was established and maintained as relaxed and welcoming. The use of forum techniques aids this goal as “the interaction among the group members brings the focus group discussion closer to everyday communication: people can express themselves in a similar way to any communication with peers or other analogous exchange of opinions relating to everyday life” (Acocella and Cataldi 2021, 13). Data was collected through audio recording and then analyzed through a thematic codebook.

The codebook was created through the lens of the Social Model of Disability, including intersections of economic deprivation, structural and systemic societal inequalities, and cultural attitudes to disability. The data was analyzed using semantic, deductive coding, and latent, inductive coding. The data was analyzed through the lens of empowerment (in line with the framework of Emancipatory Research) and the prioritization of the issues the community indicate as most pertinent (in line with the framework of Action Research). The forums provided a range of perspectives, but recurring topics and opinions included:

- The consistent, considerable financial strain on community organizations to maintain buildings and the need for extensive investment from local authorities and funders (17.2% of participants).

There is a decrease in financial support available for community arts with one participant claiming “we have a lot less community funding this year than we’ve ever had, which worries me. However, I’ve always been able to just call on the companies to supply me with money to do what I want to do. It’s getting harder and harder to do that now, so we’re having to go after more grants” (forum participant, May 8, 2025) The financial strain was known by participants who regularly attended arts groups, who seemed frustrated by the lack of funding on offer. They voiced deep appreciation for those who run the arts initiatives, expressing how they value the sense of community that the local organizations offer, with one participant stating “it’s so varied in terms of disability. Well, there’s proper toilets. You always feel welcome. Even the first time I come, I just couldn’t believe it” (forum participant, March 20, 2025).

- The history of rejected funding applications experienced by organizations (10.3% of participants).

There was a sense of being “left behind” and that the funding process was exclusionary. There was clear resentment toward how funding processes are structured. Participants stated that, regarding funding, “what we found daily, to be quite honest, is that it’s very exclusive. There’s a certain little clique of people that get all the funding, and they’re all well speaking” (forum participant, March 20, 2025). This implied educational barriers surrounding written communication skills hinder community arts opportunities, making funding less accessible.

- Existing tensions in the community and a feeling of distrust from individuals and organizations between some public sector bodies and private sector companies (26.4% of participants).

Participants claimed that “there’s a lot of money involved that’s going to an exclusive amount of people that make a living from it, and that is not getting fed down to grass roots like this, where the money’s needed...it’s not coming down into the local community where it’s needed and where it should be” (forum participant, March 20, 2025). This has led

organizations to rely on their community and to be self-sufficient rather than working with government initiatives or large stakeholders in the community.

- A need for awareness and understanding from arts venues and event-organizers regarding accessibility and inclusion (97.7% of participants).

There was a strong sense of uncertainty in how a venue or event will be structured and facilitated and anxieties over access to (and the suitability of) basic facilities in venues such as disabled toilets. Several participants shared experiences where there was no disabled toilet or the disabled toilet was not available to them—one example was that the toilet was being used as storage for inflated party balloons. One participant (who is a carer) pointed out that even when disabled toilets are available, they are not all built with a consistent level of accessibility, stating a need for “making accessible toilets with hoists, because they say there’s a disabled toilet which has often not got a hoist. So, it’s not fully accessible!” (forum participant, March 20, 2025). A hoist is a “a mechanical device that is used in healthcare to transfer physically disabled individuals from one place or position to another” (Disability Hoist Hire 2026), notably to use the toilet. The inconsistency of these being provided has led carers and disabled individuals to be reliant on online resources and information regarding accessibility within venues, but this is inconsistent and generally passed by word of mouth. There was also a sense of attitudinal barriers as some disabled people had joined arts sessions at the Wrexham Miner’s Project “specifically because they weren’t made to feel welcome in another popular arts setting” (forum participant, March 20, 2025).

- The impact of the arts is observable on a regular basis (82.7% of participants).

The participants believed the positive outcomes of celebrating local culture and heritage through the arts is tangible in Wrexham. Intergenerational impact can be seen when “children come in and learn about their industrial history, and they go and tell their parents” (forum participant, March 20, 2025). The arts have a demonstrable, positive impact on those with new disabilities, helping them cope with the grief of losing their old lives and identities. One participant became disabled later in life and shared how it affected their emotional well-being stating, “I lost my job, but it was like a bereavement. I didn’t want to do anything” (forum participant, April 10, 2025). After attending arts workshops, the participant shared that their confidence and emotional stability improved. They shared that when they have felt depressed about their disability, “art takes that away. For me, it takes it all away. I disappear into my piece of wood...it is a form of escape. Therapy, you know” (forum participant, April 10, 2025).

- Disabilities take many forms and face different challenges and barriers to the arts (74.7% of participants).

There was acknowledgment that “there’s a lot of stigma over people who have got hidden disabilities” (forum participant, April 10, 2025) and that those with invisible disabilities are not considered regarding accessibility in the same way or to the same extent as to those with visible mobility-based disabilities. Participants indicated for those with invisible disabilities accessibility barriers start before arriving at a venue stating, “access is the problem if you have a learning disability, even researching how to get there” (forum participant, March 20, 2025).

- A desire to learn new skills and experiences in a range of different creative mediums (25.2% of participants).

The forums demonstrated a strong belief that creative industries were “missing out” on a wealth of undiscovered creative talent and exciting, important artistic voices. It was not purely about access to the arts for the benefit of disabled people, but for the benefit of the arts industry and audiences (forum May 8, 2025). There was a particular focus on film and acting although any art opportunity was welcome, as long as it offered opportunities to meet people and create community connections (forums March 20, 2025 and May 8, 2025).

- Accessibility can improve and disabled people hope for more opportunities in the future (88.5% of participants).

The groups voiced their hopes for the future including more opportunities to create theater, have careers in the arts, and for there to be greater understanding surrounding accessibility for the existing venues and arts events-organizers, rather than the limited awareness they have previously experienced. One participant commented that regarding accessibility and arts events/venues, “it’s a lack of awareness, I think a lot of the time. It’s just, it’s an afterthought” (forum participant, May 8, 2025).

The survey had limited engagement with one response, despite being circulated by both Emerge Community Arts and the Wrexham Miner’s Project, as well as online promotion from the University of Wrexham on their social media platforms. However, the limited responses voiced similar frustrations and aspirations as the in-person forum participants. The survey responses reiterated the positive impact of the arts claiming, “it’s calming to produce something, empowering to gain ownership over the final product with a good impact on self-esteem” (survey response, May 16, 2025). However, the barriers to the arts that were communicated through the survey differed from the forums, sharing that “I am personally finding it difficult to go to spaces with lots of people, so this is a barrier to my engagement in group activities and potentially learning/improvement opportunities” (survey response, May 16, 2025). This response implies a barrier to attending in-person forums and the need for mixed-methods approaches to increase access to research projects.

Evaluation and Next Steps

When evaluating the outcomes of this stage of the research, we have compared the specific insights regarding Wrexham with the wider information we already have about Wales and Europe. The key takeaways from this research are that:

- Consistent themes are present within Wrexham as seen in initial literature review.
- Socio-economic deprivation impacts arts engagement and access to arts-based activities.
- Disabled voices are needed within arts planning and arts-based research.
- Accessibility is restricted by a lack of consistency, immobilizing and disincentivizing disabled individuals from engaging with the arts.
- Methods of engagement with disabled participants require further development and consideration for greater success.
- Arts opportunities are both valued and wanted by disabled people in Wrexham.

The overarching themes of disillusionment and anxiety surrounding the arts industry that the *Time to Act* report and Disability Arts Cymru's manifesto detailed is evidently prevalent in the Wrexham community based on the responses from forum participants. The higher levels of disability and socio-economic deprivation within Wrexham have arguably exacerbated the challenges related to arts accessibility that prior research has indicated. The forum participants reiterated the points made in the report and manifesto and also highlighted some of the educational and economic boundaries indicated within The Cultural Learning Alliance's 2025 report.

The methods used in research have proven to be broadly successful with a great deal of appreciation from forum participants, with one elderly gentleman stating "it's just nice to have someone listen. It means a lot" (forum participant, March 20, 2025). It could be ascertained that disabled people in Wrexham were keen to have a platform and opportunity to share their experiences and ideas around the topics of accessibility, the arts, and the local community. Working with local disability arts organizations proved successful in recruiting a satisfactory number of participants who had no hesitation in sharing with the researchers. Reaching further individuals may require building more collaborations with similar organizations. The venues used helped with accessibility, with participants appearing confident in coming to the forums and using facilities such as toilets. The limited survey response was unanticipated by the researchers and collaborators, and further insight into why this was the case is needed for any future attempts to gather information on this topic in online spaces. Promoting surveys within trusted community spaces (both physical and online) could hypothetically increase engagement. Virtual forums may also support participation by reducing logistical and emotional barriers such as transport challenges and social anxiety.

Following these forums and collating the survey responses, a program for the arts in Wrexham will be formulated that is informed and shaped by the viewpoints, experiences and aspirations shared. The ideas developed by the forum participants include forum theater sessions to educate and inform arts venues, event-organizers, creative practitioners, and policy makers about disability and accessibility. The program will aim to commission local arts organizations and disabled artists to realize these ideas, enriching the arts practice of this demographic for both participant and practitioner, while informing those outside the demographic on accessibility and disability. This stage of the research also aims to formulate guidelines and pragmatic information for stakeholders regarding future practice, following an analysis and evaluation of the success and impact of the arts program.

AI Acknowledgment

The authors declare that generative AI or AI-assisted technologies were not used in any way to prepare, write, or complete this manuscript. The authors confirm that they are the sole authors of this article and take full responsibility for the content therein, as outlined in COPE recommendations.

Informed Consent

The authors have obtained informed consent from all participants.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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