

Autism and Theatre

Austim and Theatre: An Industry Inspiration day for theatre staff and autism experts was held on 10 October 2011 at the Unicorn Theatre, London.

The event aimed to achieve long-lasting cultural change and build on the exceptional access work that already exists within the UK theatre industry. It will also serve as a launch pad for similar regional venue awareness days and establish future ongoing engagement between local theatres and families affected by autism.

Over 200 delegates from across the industry attended the Inspiration Day which provided an opportunity to openly discuss the subject of autism in forum and break out sessions, identify the challenges facing families, theatres and performers, learn about best practice for the future and hear from inspirational guest speakers who have personal experience with these issues.

The event was chaired by Jodi Myers and Jonathan Meth. Guest speakers included ATG's Joint Chief Executive, Rosemary Squire OBE, children's playwright, producer and Chair of Action for Children's Arts, David Wood OBE and CEO of the National Autistic Society, Mark Lever.

The event was a partnership between the [Ambassador Theatre Group](#) Ltd (ATG), the [Unicorn Theatre](#), [National Autistic Society](#) (NAS), [Action for Children's Arts](#) (ACA), [Theatrical Management Association](#) (TMA) and the [Society of London Theatre](#) (SOLT). Further partners involved in supporting the day included [Ambitious About Autism](#) and the [Institute of Entertainment and Arts Management](#) (IEAM).

Information, presentations and resources from the day can be downloaded below:

Understanding Autism

Heather Wildsmith, South East Regional Officer, National Autistic Society

[Click here to download Heather's presentation: Understanding autism spectrum disorders \(ASDs\)](#)

Relaxed Performances

Joanna Loveday, Action Research Communications Manager, West Yorkshire Playhouse

[Click here to download Joanna's presentation: Relaxed Performances at West Yorkshire Playhouse](#)

Visual Story

Kirsty Hoyle, Access Manager, Unicorn Theatre and Access Manager, SOLT/TMA

[Click here to download Kirsty's social story: Unicorn Theatre Visual Story – The Snow Queen](#)

n.b. At the Autism Day Kirsty talked about Social Stories – please note that Social Stories is trademarked in the US so we have now called these Visual Stories.



A visual resource for children and young adults with Autism Spectrum Condition visiting the theatre. This resource is intended to help prepare any visitors for a new experience and to help them to become familiar with the surroundings.

Autism Friendly Cinema Screenings

Paul Baxter, Empire Cinemas Ltd

[Click here to download Paul's presentation: Autism Friendly Screenings](#)

Access London Theatre

Website: <http://www.officiallondontheatre.co.uk/access/>

The website contains information on all the access options available in Theatreland including venue access and assisted performance information. The [Access London Theatre brochure](#) and [monthly e-bulletin](#) lists all assisted performances and venue access information. The brochure is distributed to 2,500 people and e-bulletin to 22,000 people.

[Click here to download an example of the monthly e-bulletin](#)

Photomaps

Lucinda Harvey, Head of Employment Relations, SOLT/TMA
Lucinda referenced photomaps which can easily be replicated.

[Click here to download an example photomap.](#)

Mystery Shoppers

SOLT and TMA have a list of approximately 50 people who are interested in being a mystery shopper. We will be asking for further recruits in our Access London Theatre e-bulletin. If you would like us to contact a mystery shopper on your behalf then please contact Lucinda Harvey.

SOLT/TMA Access Manager

SOLT/TMA has recruited an Access Manager to oversee and progress the work of SOLT and TMA in welcoming disabled people to theatres, to advise and review this work and maximise opportunities for this work in relation to the forthcoming Paralympic year.

Kirsty Hoyle has taken up this position and will be working for SOLT/TMA for 2.5 days a week and continue her work at the Unicorn Theatre for 2.5 days a week.

Practical / quick-fire tips - small steps to take that can be implemented

Audit: Consider an access audit to assess your current accessibility and to receive feedback on reasonable adjustments that can be made.

Training: Access & Autism Awareness Training for all staff will help increase awareness and empower



frontline staff to effectively and positively work with disabled audience members.

Policy: It is important for every venue to have a clear and regularly updated Access Policy in line with the Equality Act (2010) and the social model of disability and that all staff are aware of and make use of this policy when dealing with audiences.

Preparation: Audience preparation is key; consider providing visual stories available online which show images of the venue and the amenities, familiarisation visits prior to shows and one point of contact for access issues.

Audience Development: Linking with local charities will provide information, support and help with audience development (e.g. Contact a Family & National Autistic Society). Also consider engaging a volunteer group of local people with disabilities who can advise on and advocate your accessibility.

Report of the day by Co-Chair, Jonathan Meth

Jonathan Meth, Executive Director, Theatre Is, and Trustee, Ambitious about Autism

[Click here to download Jonathan's summary report of the day](#)

This report will feature in the next issue of Prompt magazine, the TMA's quarterly industry-specific publication.

Contact information for all speakers and contributors

Contact details of all speakers, contributors and contact details from the day can be [downloaded here](#).

