Access and activism: the archives preserving



The Disabled People's Archive is preserving moments of protest and community. Credit: The Disabled People's Archive, Greater Manchester Coalition of Disabled People.

Meet two projects in the north of England opening up their archives to shine a spotlight on the fight for disability rights.

The Disabled People's Archive

Earlier this year we awarded Greater Manchester Coalition of Disabled People £237,928. The funding is supporting the organisation's project The Disabled People's Archive to share the history of the Disabled People's Movement with more individuals through community exhibitions and engagement workshops.

What is the Disabled People's Movement?

Sarah Hitchen, Archive Project Worker, explains that since the 1970s "it has been about breaking down the barriers that disabled people encounter on a daily basis.

"This largely hidden social movement was instrumental in bringing about governmental changes such as the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and the Equality Act of 2010. It played a crucial role in the development of Disability Studies and it established a distinct culture and identity of disability through the Disability Arts Movement for example."

Self-representation is crucial

Sarah says: “Community-led archives, like the Disabled People's Archive, collect records that are produced and selected by disabled people themselves, which means that disabled people control the way that their history is portrayed.

“Our focus on self-representation shifts the narrative away from traditional, often demeaning, medical perspectives to the social model of disability.

“Unles
behind



An activist protesting inaccessible public transport in Nottingham. Credit: The Disabled People's Archive, Greater Manchester Coalition of Disabled People.

Challenging stereotypes

Among the items that have stuck with Sarah most are photographs of disabled protestors from the 1990s showing “wheelchair users quite literally throwing themselves out of their wheelchairs to fight for the rights of disabled people.

“These images really challenged the still predominant stereotype of disabled people as objects of pity and instead show them as brave, defiant and angry human beings.”

Ella Clarke, Archive Lead, agrees that some of the collection’s most powerful materials are those relating to protest: “In particular, a pair of handcuffs which were used by activists to chain themselves to public transport, such as buses and trains which were not accessible.

“By using civil disobedience methods like blocking vehicles, roads and building entrances, activists were able to highlight that 'public' transport and spaces were not open to all members of the public and therefore had to change.”

The Arcadea Archive

In Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Arcadea is uncovering the history of disability arts and activism in the north east with our £43,284 grant.

Founded by disabled people in 1991, Arcadea (formerly known as NorDAF) was an early part of the Disability Arts Movement which developed in the 1990s. The movement supports community building, encourages the fight for disability rights and challenges societal barriers through the arts.

The project will collect physical materials and record oral histories that tell the story of how the charity began. These will add to
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public.



Hub studio artist Juary Delgado Lima creating work for the archive exhibition at Newcastle Contemporary Art. Credit: Arcadea.

Katy Saunderson, CEO of Arcadea, says: “Current studio artists will learn about their heritage while responding to the archive creatively. We hope re-engaging with their radical roots at a time when there is renewed threat to their rights and freedom – such as cuts to essential benefits – will provide encouragement and build confidence and community at a crucial time for disabled people.

“As our archive becomes publicly accessible at North East Museums, we feel it will enable wider audiences to experience this too as it inspires and educates the public in the groundbreaking work of proactive disabled artists and activists.”

Have an idea for a disability heritage project?

Find out what funding is available and what we can do to support your access needs during the application process.



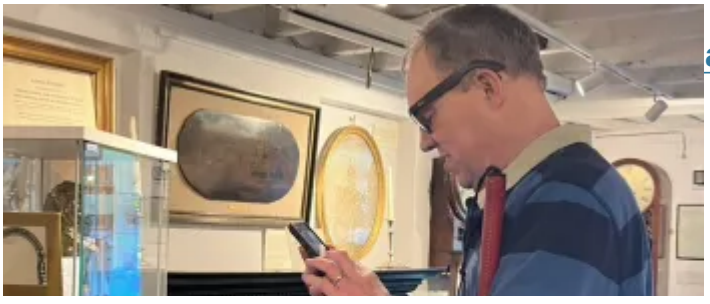
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A 1991 group photo of disability arts practitioners. David Hevey is standing fifth from the right in the second row. Photo: NDACA.

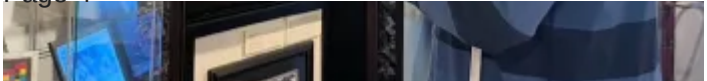


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The project will record and archive memories of learning disability and family life. Credit: Mencap Cymru.



and parenting



The museum worked with charities and the community to adopt NaviLens technology. Credit: Flick Baker.

The app transforming visitor experience for museum-goers with vision impairment