Grantee Q&A: adapting oral history methods for



D/deaf people were involved as crew and interviewees in the making of the project's film. Credit: Zebra Access.

Bob Marsh, Managing Director at Zebra Access, and Robyn Swannack, Project Manager, offer their reflections and advice on helping a community tell its own stories while accommodating a wide range of access needs.

About the project

When Walsall Deaf People's Centre closed in 2019 after decades as a valued community hub (famous for its iconic New Year's Eve parties), Bob and Robyn saw an opportunity to bring people together to remember and record 100 years of Walsall's D/deaf history before it was lost.

The two-year project was led by D/deaf people and prioritised accessibility so that everyone could take part including D/deaf, Hard of Hearing, deafblind and deafened people and their friends and families.

We awarded Zebra Access £88,000 to collect community memories through archive research, interviews, film-making and a walking tour of Walsall. A screening of the project film in May this year marked both the project's end and 80 years since Walsall Deaf People's Centre was founded.

What did you find most challenging about your application and how did you overcome it?

Bob: As this was our first heritage project, we thought carefully about how the project would be delivered, what resources would be needed and how to develop a realistic budget for work that was new to us.

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People signing 'Walsall' in British Sign Language, captured on the project's community history walking tour of the town. Credit: Zebra Access.

What would you recommend organisations spend more time on when developing their application?

Bob: Develop a clear project plan with activities set out in chronological order. This helps demonstrate that your organisation can deliver the project effectively and manage it in a structured way.

What do you know now that you wish you'd known before you began the project?

Robyn: That heritage awareness within the Deaf community would need to be developed alongside the project itself. Many people were enthusiastic about sharing memories but had not previously thought about their experiences as part

of local heritage.

How did you adapt oral history techniques for D/deaf participants?

Robyn d
seating ze,
lighting



U-shaped seating layout used during a volunteer oral history training session. Credit: Zebra Access.

Filming interviews with D/deaf participants for our project film also needed adaptations including interviewer positioning, camera framing and how to support natural storytelling – D/deaf interviewees may answer a question directly without repeating or referencing the question itself.

When delivering your project, what surprised you?

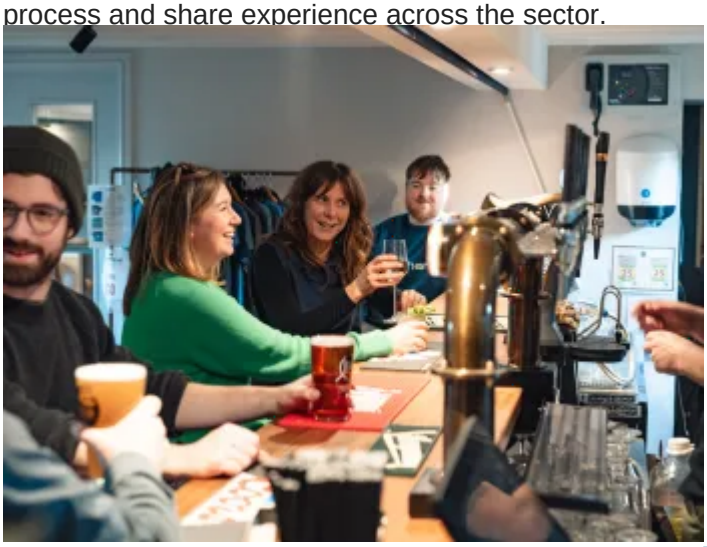
Robyn: Unexpectedly, this heritage project helped better connect the local D/deaf community. It provided a rare opportunity for people from different generations, backgrounds and social networks to come together around a shared story. Seeing their stories at the community screening of the project's documentary film last month, people laughed, cried, shared memories and continued conversations long after the films had finished.

Conversations that might not otherwise have happened enabled people to reflect collectively on what the community achieved over the past century.

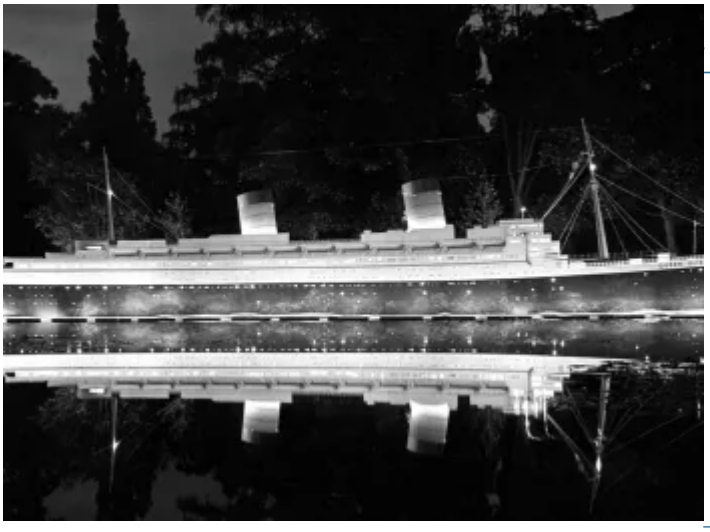
What's been the most rewarding outcome of your project?

Bob and Robyn: It has helped restore a sense of pride, resilience and ownership within the community. It has become a way of honouring those who came before, recognising those who continue to contribute today, and ensuring that future generations understand the strength, achievements and cultural identity of Walsall's D/deaf community.

This is part of a series of Q&As with successful grantees – helping to demystify the project application and delivery process and share experience across the sector.



The restored pub has become a focus for socialising and a hub of key community facilities. Photo: Ty'n Llan.



key to community project success

The original illuminations captured the imaginations of local people and visitors from around the UK. Photo: Whittle Productions.



ival of light



A community group build benches as part of the Lost Peatlands project. Photo: Neath Port Talbot Council.

Grantee Q&A: how to build a compelling project narrative