

Circus for Everybody

The Trainer's Toolkit



Extraordinary Bodies,
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Cirque Bijou

www.cirquebijou.co.uk



Diverse City

www.diversecity.org.uk

**national centre
for circus arts**

The National Centre for Circus Arts

www.nationalcircus.org.uk

With thanks to



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We welcome all questions, insights and further contributions to this toolkit.

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This toolkit aims to widen access to circus training and break down the barriers to circus for D/deaf¹ and disabled² people. Extraordinary Bodies, Circomedia, Cirque Bijou, Diverse City and The National Centre for Circus Arts have been working together to identify and overcome these barriers in our own performance and training organisations.

We have found that if D/deaf and disabled people are represented in every aspect of our work; as creatives, as consultants, as workshop facilitators and as circus professionals, then it is inevitable that different choices will be made in the teaching environment. We open up new ways of thinking that improve our practice and our space for everybody.

Our discoveries are the basis of this toolkit, which shares good practice from across the sector. It offers support to our trainers and artists, working with all ages and abilities, and in a variety of contexts, from informal community classes and workshops to degree programmes. Using the toolkit will help you feel more confident when delivering circus to a range of participants in a training environment.

We encourage you to work with D/deaf and disabled artists and participants directly to explore questions and solutions together. Take creative risks and explore variations and opportunities with everyone in the space to create exciting new possibilities. By doing this, circus can be pushed in new directions.

Our knowledge of inclusive circus practice is not exhaustive and of course many other circus trainers, schools and artists already work with diverse and inclusive groups. Together with artists and trainers, we want to move forwards as a sector to start to build a more diverse, just and radical future for circus, one that reflects the world as it really is.



In C, British Paraorchestra & Extraordinary Bodies,
© Paul Blakemore

¹ Deaf culture is very strong for people whose first language is BSL. Many identify as a linguistic minority (rather than disabled people) and refer to themselves as 'Deaf people' (capital 'D'). People who become deafened and non-BSL users are likely to call themselves 'deaf people' (lower case 'd'). They are more likely to think of themselves as disabled people.

² We are using the term 'disabled person' following the social model, which locates the barrier to access within society, rather than within the person. This is the preferred terminology within the UK (although not in North America/Australia).

Why inclusion matters

The social model of disability is a way of viewing the world, developed by disabled people. The model says that people are disabled by barriers in society, not by their impairment or difference. Barriers can be physical, like buildings not having accessible toilets. Or they can be caused by people's attitudes to difference, like assuming disabled people can't do certain things.

Scope

The social model³ helps us see that it is the barriers in our society that disable people. Removing these barriers helps to create equality and offers disabled people more independence, choice and control. Read more on Scope's website (www.scope.org.uk/about-us/everyday-equality) about how the UK is trying to be a country where disabled and non-disabled people have equal opportunities. The National Disability Arts Collection & Archive (NDACA), a project delivered by Shape Arts, also offers a video explaining the social model of disability (www.youtube.com/watch?v=24KE__OCKMw) in more detail.

The social model of disability underpins this toolkit because it offers the practical steps towards inclusion. Extending a welcome to D/deaf and disabled people in circus training is a step towards the greater visibility of D/deaf and disabled people in society. Just as important are the positive artistic innovations and creative breakthroughs that flow from desegregation and working with different participants in circus. A more diverse circus sector represents more of society and is more interesting and surprising – which in turn attracts more diverse audiences. Increasing public awareness of and familiarity with the positive benefits of diversity and difference fosters our understanding, empathy and sense of connection, and helps to break down the silos in our society.



SENDaWelcome partnership
project with Circomedia
© SENDaWelcome

³ The disabled activist Vic Finkelstein is widely credited as the founder of the social model of disability.

Five Principles of Inclusive Circus

Inclusive circus is a relatively new field of practice. There is still learning, sharing and responding to be done together, exploring how to encourage growth and awareness in the field. Having the confidence to embrace 'not knowing' and to experiment with doing things differently is where the future of circus gets exciting.

No one has all the answers and there are no hard-and-fast rules, but as a starting point here are some important principles to consider:

1

Be open to learning

In the inclusive circus setting, the trainer is often learning as much as the participant. D/deaf and disabled people live every day navigating barriers and are therefore experts when it comes to their mind and body. Continual learning from participants requires a willingness to be open to their expertise, responding to suggested solutions, and reflecting on successes as well as challenges. Consider adjusting priorities and learning outcomes as unconventional support and extended time frames can make all the difference between someone participating or not.

2

Extend the 'rebellious heart' of circus

If the notion that there is a 'right' and a 'wrong' circus technique, body or move, is believed then not only are participants put at a disadvantage, but the essential character of circus becomes stifled. D/deaf and disabled artists are taking circus in new directions and continue to make the art form the benchmark for innovative integrated practice. If creativity, originality and innovation are at the centre of how success is measured, circus will continue to challenge and be at the forefront of radical arts practice.

6

3

Be flexible and adaptable

Having only one way to do something is restrictive: for example, a pointed toe may be considered ‘good technique’ but it’s limiting for some people. Work to empower participants to find solutions together, by offering a range of ideas and possibilities. Avoid being precious about the art form and, rather than saying ‘That’s not the correct technique’, think ‘Why not?’ Encouraging openness, being flexible and not being afraid to ask questions are all important qualities for a prosperous and dynamic teaching and learning environment.

4

Embed diversity and inclusion in every strand of work

Environment, language, websites and people all signal an attitude towards diversity and inclusion. Diversity should be included as a value throughout all offerings so that it is represented everywhere and clear in the mission. Employ D/deaf and disabled trainers. Be explicit about difference and diversity: acknowledge diversity in the room. Make communications, marketing language, images, copy, formats and so on – accessible and representative. Work should be at its best when D/deaf, disabled and non-disabled people collaborate together so that segregation dissolves and the ‘them’ and ‘us’ of diversity is broken down.

5

Extend practice through partnerships

Find colleagues to share successes and challenges with. Look for new partners who can help encourage thinking differently and increase confidence. Being comfortable talking about difference will help to embrace it. Partners both within and beyond the sector can help by providing support to move forward more quickly.



Are you ready?

Circus lends itself to inclusive practice, so you are already equipped to widen access to your training. Use these checklists to think about your own practice:

You	✓	You give your participants	✓
Have a 'can do' attitude		Training adapted to their individual needs	
Blend gymnastics, dance and technical (rigging/equipment) training		One-to-one advice on equipment	
Are disciplined and rigorous; informal and playful; anarchic and surprising		Training in small groups	
Are practical and creative		Individual adaptations to exercises	
Ensure that all participants are able to excel		Encouragement to capitalise on their individual qualities and strengths	

Is your organisation ready?

Q1. Can a wheelchair user, visually impaired person or someone with limited mobility access your building?



Go to Q2.



Invite a disabled person, visually impaired person and a wheelchair user to do an access audit and identify adaptations – such as a mobile ramp/other access.
Go back to Q1.



Clearly signpost all the options for access and provide a telephone number and contact name.
Go back to Q1.

Q2. Is the space welcoming to D/deaf and disabled people?



Go to Q3.



Check all existing access provision: height of customer service counters (are they variable?); accessible toilets (are they free of clutter and does everyone know where they are?); alternative formats (audio, BSL, captioned, large print) for printed/online information; do your promotional images signal diversity and inclusion?
Go back to Q2.



Partner with a local disability service to set up a 'mystery shopping exercise' to get feedback on the level of welcome D/deaf and disabled people experience.
Go back to Q2.

Q3. Are your staff D/deaf and disability aware?



Go to Q4.



Organise a D/deaf and disability awareness audit.
Go back to Q3.



Organise D/deaf and disability awareness training.
Go back to Q3.

Q4. Is it easy to find your way around the building?



Go to Q5.



Is navigation well signposted?
Is there good light throughout your building? Are edges of stairs highlighted? Are spaces clear and uncluttered.
Go back to Q4.



Partner with a local disability service to set up a 'mystery shopper exercise' for feedback on how easy it is to find your way around. Adopt suggestions for adaptations.
Go back to Q4.

Q5. Are trainers open to teaching and adapting to D/deaf and disabled people?



Go to Q6.



Set up company CPD on the vision, mission and values. Agree behaviours and practice to support them. Plan for inclusion with whole team using a risk assessment matrix. Employ D/deaf and disabled people as advisors, consultants, mentors, trainers, artists and on the wider staff team.
Go back to Q5.



Does your mission reflect commitment to inclusion? Is commitment to inclusion covered in all job descriptions and role reviews?
Go back to Q5.

Q6. Are your classes and sessions attracting D/deaf and disabled people?



Go to Q7.



Check the percentage of enquiries, sign-ups, attendees that are D/deaf and disabled to see whether you are translating interest into attendance.
Go back to Q6.



Monitor all enquiries, sign-ups, memberships, audiences, to establish your baseline reach. Partner a D/deaf or disability organisation to target your offer. Put together an action plan for reaching your target group.
Go back to Q6.

Q7. Are your classes and sessions retaining D/deaf and disabled participants?



Go to Q8.



Monitor and compare sign-ups and non-attendance. Follow up non-attendees to identify reasons for drop-off. Invite regular feedback from participants and access workers regarding their experience in your setting.
Go back to Q7.



Offer a smaller-scale familiarisation strand or low-stress options for those who may not feel confident and who may not want to join a regular class straight away.
Go back to Q7.



Q8. Is your teaching practice accessible to D/deaf and disabled participants?



Go to Q9.



Is it easy to concentrate and hear instructions or are there different classes running at the same time in the same space?

Are instructions given in more than one way (verbal, visual, practical demonstration)?

Do participants always face each other when talking?

Does your rigging, equipment offer variations in height, size etc?

Go back to Q8.



Source relevant training from partner organisations that offer inclusive creative practice training.
Go back to Q8.

Q9. Do you regularly gather feedback and monitor and review your progress against your action plan?



You are on the right track to putting inclusion at the heart of your organisation.



Ask D/deaf and disabled people who want to access your activities to help you.

Go back to Q9.



Call out for help and convene a specialist working group with a range of stakeholders to help you put your action plan in motion. Offer free or discounted places to those who offer their time.
Go back to Q9.

Looking at access needs

Improving accessibility for D/deaf and disabled people will improve the quality of the learning experience and create a more welcoming environment for everyone. However, every D/deaf or disabled person will have different access needs and a solution that works for one person may not be right for another. Access is never 'finished' and there are no specific guidelines so remain open to the needs of everyone.

Here is a guide to help you consider the access needs of your participants.

Audit your venue

- Work with D/deaf and disabled people to do a Venue Access Audit (forms.gle/QJNCMTia66zjb6Wt6) with you.
- To reduce pressure on class time, find out about the individual access needs of all participants in advance by asking for an Individual Access Audit (forms.gle/FmHLYkJrX9PsbPDM7) to be completed. Not all impairments are visible.
- Tell each participant what adaptations you can make and what access provision you can offer them.
- Where necessary, talk through the detail of individual access needs face to face in a relaxed environment.
- Be clear about what information needs to be shared with trainers. (They do not necessarily need to know medical conditions, only what the participant needs to participate effectively and safely.)

Inform the participants

- Share the results of individual audits with trainers as appropriate for planning purposes.
- Give simple information about any access challenges of your building.
- Signpost travel, parking and transport simply on your communications.
- Give a contact name and number for people to find out more.

Consider the budget

- Ask your participants what access support they need within the context of your sessions. Do not assume. They are the experts and they will know best about who can support them. They may also have personal budgets.
- Always have an access line in every budget so that access costs are not forgotten.
- Split your budget into different areas, such as access fees, access costs, access equipment.
- Allow contingency to put new recommendations or adaptations into action.
- Find out whether your D/deaf and disabled employees are registered for Access to Work (www.gov.uk/access-to-work), a government scheme that pays for some access costs in order to support disabled people in the workplace. (See Access workers: Contracting and fees below.)

Understand participants' support needs

Don't assume that you know what disabled and D/deaf participants need. Be guided by each individual, they know best how you can assist them.

Wheelchair users

- Think about parking spaces.
- Think about space, access and obstacles.
- Do not lean on someone's wheelchair.
- Ask before touching or pushing someone's wheelchair.
- Sit at the same height as a wheelchair user when you have a conversation.

Visually impaired people

- Ask what support is needed. Most visually impaired people have some vision.
- Announce yourself and tell the person where you are within the context of your environment.
- Before you touch somebody, ask them how they prefer to be guided.
- Tell them about any obstacles (such as cups of tea on tables, furniture, barriers and doors, especially swing doors).
- Tell the person what's in front of them when approaching doors, kerbs and the first and last step on the stairs.
- If you are guiding a person to a chair, tell them where the nearest available chair is and place their hand on the back of the chair.
- Give verbal feedback during a conversation, for example saying 'Yes' instead of nodding your head.

D/deaf people

- Ask D/deaf participant's what their preferable language is; British Sign Language, Sign Supported English, or oral. Do not assume all D/deaf people are BSL users.
- If any D/deaf participants are working with interpreters, the preference is to engage and watch the interpreter in an opposite position. But always check.
- Before setting up a session, think about the physical positioning of yourself as a trainer and the D/deaf participants based on their requirements.
- If the space you work in has a lot on sunlight coming in, discuss with participants how you can best set up activities so that the glare from the sun is not affecting any communication, or safety aspects.
- Ensure to keep eye level in any angled positions or when working at height toward the participant's face, check if they understand using communication method established e.g. the participant giving a thumbs up.
- Find out more by watching The Aerial Glossary of Signs (8:04) in this film by Graeae: vimeo.com/193921912
- Break down the activities including clarifying health and safety before starting an exercise.

Access/support workers

These are additional members of staff employed either by the participant or by the organisation supporting the participant. Access workers include British Sign Language interpreters, lipspeakers, sighted guides, support workers and first-aid trained and/or health care professionals. For high-level needs, the access/support worker will take on moving and handling tasks as well as support with personal care and administering medication.

Employment

Be clear who is employing the access/support worker. Some participants will have their own team and others may have other arrangements. If you need to recruit access/support workers, you can put a call out via a range of networks with the details through:

- Art form specific networks – National Centre for Circus Arts, Circomedia, Extraordinary Bodies, Graeae, CircusWorks, The Circus Development Agency
- Disability arts networks - Disability Arts Online (disabilityarts.online), Shape Arts (shapearts.org.uk), Access all Areas (accessallareas.org)
- Local community networks in your area – schools, community groups, support agencies.

Contracting and fees

- You may either contract an access worker directly or through an agency. Be aware that agencies will likely charge an additional fee.
- You will need to contract two access workers if they are working for a long period to ensure that they have breaks.
- Access worker fees vary. BSL interpreters charge around £260 per day (£35 per hour) and sighted guides charge around £116 per day (£14.50 per hour).
- Ensure that you always use registered interpreters on the [NRCPD](#) website and that they are carrying their ID badge.
- You will usually need to book two BSL interpreters together so that they can take breaks.

Before sessions

- Discuss with participants and access workers how the support will ensure full access to the session.
- Brief access workers on the session, including its location and how the participant will get there, to identify issues in advance and prepare specialist equipment. The participant may need the access worker to assist with travel.
- Explain evacuation procedures and the space layout (including toilets).

During sessions

- The access worker will hold relevant sensitive data and emergency contact details for participants and provide personal care (toileting/hoisting/feeding) as required.
- The access worker will support trainers to understand participants needs. They may join in the circus session, participate alongside the participants or be in the room to support with group interaction. Alternatively, they may be there solely to support the participant during breaks (with personal care) and not participate in the session at all.

Assistance animals

These animals (such as hearing/seeing dogs) offer specialised support to D/deaf and disabled participants. During each session, make sure that:

- The participant briefs everybody about appropriate behaviour with their assistance animal
- No one distracts assistance animals when they are on duty
- Food is out of the reach of assistance animals
- Water is provided for assistance animals.

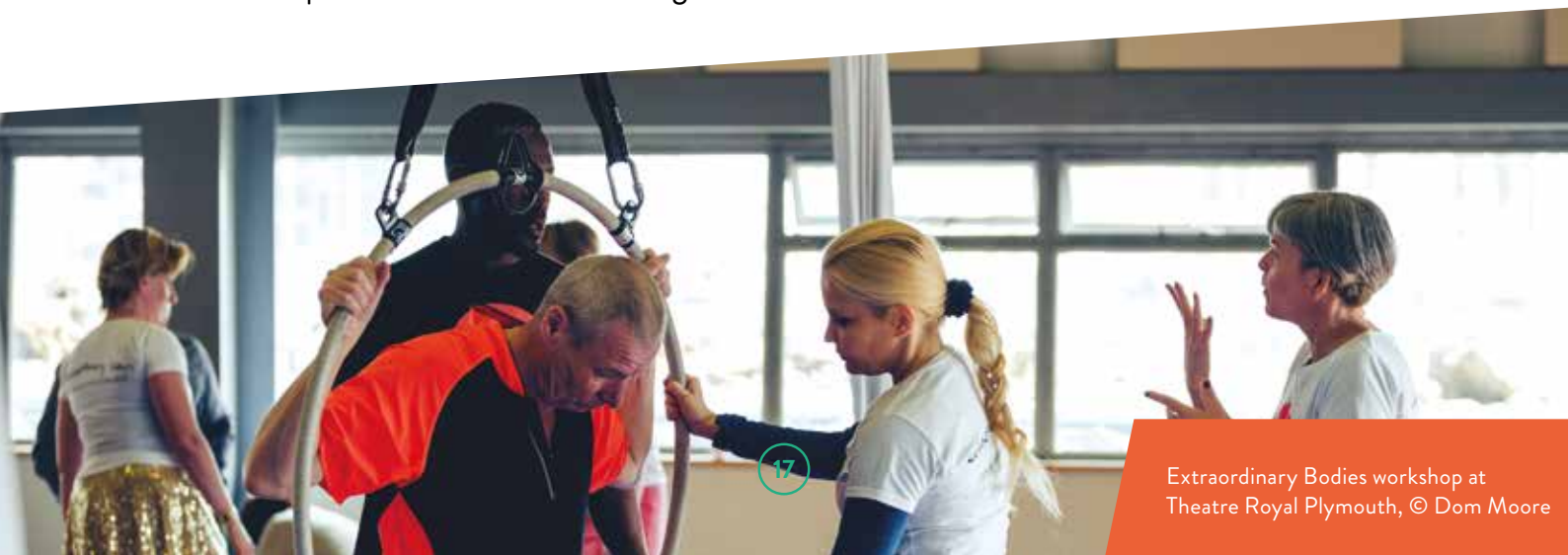
Communication

When working with disabled and D/deaf participants, you may worry that you don't have the right language or that you might say the wrong thing. Here are some things to remember:

- **Everybody is an individual**, ask how you can communicate most effectively.
- Some disabled people find that written English is not accessible. It may be their second language or there may be other barriers to reading.
- British Sign Language has a completely different language structure from written and spoken English.
- **Do not assume** that someone with a different voice or speech pattern is learning disabled.
- **Do not assume** that you know the extent of someone's understanding.

Face-to-face communication



- Always **talk directly** to disabled and D/deaf participants – not to their access worker or interpreter.
- **Allow time** to communicate whilst a participant replies to you or uses a communication aid. Be patient, don't interrupt and pay attention – it's just a different way of having a conversation.
- **Don't panic** if the person you are communicating with does not understand you at first, or if you can't understand them. Never pretend you have understood. Ask them to repeat what they are saying until you understand them, and check your understanding.
- If you don't know the best way to communicate, **ask**.
- If you are communicating with someone who is learning disabled, **avoid jargon**, speak clearly using open questions, short words and sentences and repeat important points. Leave space to check understanding and for clarification.



Written communication

- Adopt the principles of the Plain English Campaign (www.plainenglish.co.uk).
- Provide alternative formats:
 - Large print and simple layouts - The Macular Society Guide (www.macularsociety.org/preparing-documents-visually-impaired-people) offers examples.
 - ‘Easy Read’ - Mencap offer a written guide (www.mencap.org.uk/easyread-video) and Photosymbols (www.photosymbols.com) provide advice on using easy read images.
 - Record audio and BSL versions of online written materials.

Dos and don'ts of lip reading

	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Find a quiet place if possible• Face the light and face the participant, about a metre (3–4 feet) away and at the same level• Stand where the background behind you is not too busy• Make sure the participant is looking at you before you start• Keep your head still and upright and stop speaking if you turn your head away• Keep your hands away from your face• Repeat words if necessary• Rephrase what you are saying if the participant doesn't understand after a few repetitions• Take frequent breaks.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Shout: this will distort your lip patterns• Talk too fast or too slowly – speak at normal speed• Lean towards the participants ear - they need to see your lips• Use unconnected single words - phrases are easier to lip read• Start a new topic without making sure the participant understands.

Your language guide



People often express a fear of “getting it wrong” or saying something inappropriate. This section does not seek to make you anxious about the language that you use, but rather to suggest ways of adapting your vocabulary. Trying not to exclude participants by use of vocabulary is habitual, but willingness to try is the key.

Don't be afraid of making an error – when you are leading an inclusive class you are often managing lots of things at one time and it's extremely challenging to think about every word. Consider how you can be more universal in your language, descriptions and instructions, to offer a more inclusive process for everyone in the space.

For example:

- “Walk to the edge of the studio” can become “go”, “move” or “travel” to the edge of the studio.
- “Stand” can become “stand or sit”.
- “Notice contact with the floor” can become “notice contact with the floor or chair”.
- “Look” can become “sense, hear, become aware of”.

Language is always changing and people have different personal preferences. Here is a guide to terms that are acceptable and those that aren't.

	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disabled • Disabled people • Has ... (an impairment) • Non-disabled • Learning disabled* • Wheelchair user • Deaf • Deaf sign language user, BSL user • Blind or partially sighted people, visually impaired people (VIP) • Mental health service user/survivor • Has cerebral palsy • Person of short stature • Personal assistant/PA, support worker/ access worker • Accessible toilet • Accessible parking, blue badge parking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Handicapped, crippled, invalided • The disabled, people with disabilities • Suffers from ..., victim of ... • Able-bodied, normal, healthy • Mentally disabled, retarded, backward • Wheelchair bound, confined to a wheelchair • Wheelchair, in a wheelchair • The deaf • Deaf and dumb, deaf mute • The blind • Mentally ill, insane, mad, crazy • Spastic • Midget • Carer (unless used directly by a disabled person) • Disabled toilet • Disabled parking

* Learning disabled people may choose to use terms such as ‘differently abled’ or neurodiverse. People with dyspraxia, dyslexia, dyscalculia, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, autistic spectrum disorder, Tourette syndrome or mental health conditions, may also choose the term neurodiverse.

Appendix

- Vic Finkelstein, widely credited as the founder of Social Model of Disability - the-ndaca.org/the-people/vic-finkelstein
- Diverse City's Venue Access Audit example forms.gle/QJNCMTia66zjb6Wt6
- Diverse City's Individual Access Audit example - forms.gle/FmHLykJrX9PsbPDM7

Contributing Organisations:

- Circomedia - www.circomedia.com
- Cirque Bijou - www.cirquebijou.co.uk
- Diverse City - www.diversecity.org.uk
- Extraordinary Bodies - www.extraordinarybodies.org.uk
- National Centre for Circus Arts - www.nationalcircus.org.uk
- Graeae - www.graeae.org
- Airhedz - www.airhedz.co.uk
- CircusWorks - www.circusworks.org

Further Resources / Organisations

- Access to Work - www.gov.uk/access-to-work
- Doing Things Differently - www.doingthingsdifferently.org.uk
- The Macular Society - www.macularsociety.org
- Mencap - www.mencap.org.uk/easyread-video
- Photosymbols - www.photosymbols.com
- The Plain English Campaign - www.plainenglish.co.uk
- Shape Arts - www.shapearts.org.uk
- The National Registers of Communication Professionals working with Deaf and Deafblind People (NRCPD) - www.nrcpd.org.uk

- Disability Arts Online - www.disabilityarts.online
- Access all Areas - www.accessallareas.org
- Extant - www.extant.org.uk
- European Youth Circus Organisation - www.eyco.org
- Lipspeaking - www.lipspeaking.co.uk
- National Deaf Children's Society - www.NDCS.org.uk
- Teaching manual for amputees by Erin Ball: www.kingstoncircusarts.com/services/teaching-resources

Films/Creative Work

- TedX talk: Circus and Autism – difference, creativity, community by Kristy Seymour - www.youtube.com/watch?v=2_I5P85CTEc
- The National Disability Arts Collection & Archive (NDACA), a project delivered by Shape Arts - video explaining the social model of disability - www.youtube.com/watch?v=24KE__OCKMw
- Extraordinary Bodies - www.vimeo.com/272735478
- Extraordinary Bodies - The Future of Circus - www.vimeo.com/281264575
- Milton Lopes - Elephant: youtu.be/raaD5HF5zA8
- Extant, Yellow Earth and Upswing - Flight Paths, featuring Amelia Cavallo: youtu.be/z2atf45pvyM
- Tina Carter and artists - UNfrIQue: vimeo.com/127269529
- Tina Carter, Sophie Partridge and Anton French - Hang-Ups!: vimeo.com/44234741
- The Aerial Glossary of Signs, Graeae: vimeo.com/193921912
- Extraordinary Bodies Young Artists: www.youtube.com/watch?v=W83hass-RjU