Accessing The Arts:
Towards Difference-Centered Design

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A note on terminology:

We recognize that language signifies different things for different people. Throughout this report, we use the term "D/deaf and disabled people" as an umbrella term to refer to D/deaf, disabled, debilitated, Mad, spoony, injured, sick and chronically ill folks.

Using people-first language ("people with disability") implies that disability diminishes one's recognition as a person, therefore you would need to foreground one's personhood. Flipping the language to identity-first terminology ("D/deaf and disabled people") recognizes that disability is central to one's identity, personhood and experience of the world, including culture.

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Foreword

Like jumping off a cliff and building a plane on the way down. This, I've discovered, is a concise and useful analogy to describe what this journey has felt like.

Having just recently incorporated Creative Users Projects in 2018 as a deaf artist and designer, I had some big ideas for what we could do as an organization to support D/deaf and disabled artists. With a work plan in hand, a problem to solve, and with no background in business, or data or in this thing called design thinking, I suited up with my sidekick Emily Servais, our partners and our board, and we jumped headfirst into the mind grinder that is Digital Strategy.

When submitting our proposal for the Accessing the Arts project, my assumption was that, if the Canada Council for the Arts trusted us as a sector to figure this stuff out, then how hard could it be? In hindsight, I imagine it's similar to what they say about having kids: if you knew what you were getting into, you might not do it.

If you're reading this report, you might be working on your own digital strategy project or you might be thinking it's a good time to start. You might be navigating the spaces in and around D/deaf and disability arts, access and digital strategy, or you might just be arriving and pulling up a chair. You might be starting to realize, as I have, how much bigger, broader and more mainstream the topic of access has become in a world that has, overnight, transformed to digital.

You might be a maker, a cultural connector, a researcher, an arts leader, an activist, an ally. You might be a producer, an event organizer, a service provider or an access consultant. Or, like us, you might be an organization. The thread that weaves through and stitches us together is a common desire to build inclusive experiences in the arts and make stories of disability and difference visible and vital.

In this report, Margaret Lam (our mentor and lead researcher) introduces the principles of human-centred design thinking and walks us through the ways it helped us better understand ourselves as an organization as well as the people whose lives we hope to impact.

The objective of this report is to share what we've learned, where we failed, why we pivoted and how we transformed our entire vision for Creative Users. There are stories, insights and recommendations for putting design thinking into practice with disability and difference at the centre. There's even a mic drop moment!

In the midst of a global pandemic, a climate crisis and ongoing systemic violence against Black and Indigenous lives, the task of building this plane is bigger than we ever imagined. And while we might all be falling, it is with the mindset inherent in these practices (empathy, optimism, iteration, creative confidence, making, embracing ambiguity, and learning from failure) that we forge ahead with the understanding that none of us can do this alone.

Lindsay Fisher
Founder and Creative Director
Creative Users Projects

Part 1: Introduction

If you ask 10 people what we could do to improve accessibility in the arts, you might get 10 different answers depending on their lived experiences of disability, whether they are an artist or an arts worker, where they live, and a myriad of other factors. It is a deceptively simple question, considering how complex the problem actually is.

Accessing The Arts was first conceived as one possible answer to that question: a digital initiative that would improve on the availability and quality of information about the accessibility of artistic events. The premise is quite intuitive: information is power, and the more informed we are, the more confident we can be, and the more we can support D/deaf and disabled individuals to experience the arts.

Just as the project was to be launched, the COVID-19 pandemic appeared at our doorstep. Suddenly, we found ourselves revising our user research plans and learning as we went about how to effectively carry out our work in a virtual context.

The severe challenges of the pandemic pushed us to reexamine what it is like to be a D/deaf or disabled artist or patron in a way that might not have been possible in pre-pandemic times. Since we could only gather virtually, many D/deaf and disabled artists and patrons from across Canada also had the chance to meet each other for the first time.

Capturing such raw and immediate responses to a global event that has left no part of our lives unturned accelerated the process by which we validated our assumptions. It perhaps also helped us be more open to uncertainty than we would have otherwise been comfortable with.

In the end, we emerged with a simple yet powerful vision for Accessing The Arts: **to amplify D/deaf and disability culture online by making stories of difference visible, and to make discoverable for the public, a truly inclusive arts culture.**

There were also some unexpected insights around the application of a critical access lens to the human-centered design process that emerged right near the end of this research process. We coined the term Difference-Centered Design to refer to this emergent design practice, and we continue to explore its potential through Accessing The Arts and other related initiatives.

This public report has two objectives:

- To share some of the design research findings that will be broadly relevant to arts and culture organizations that are looking to innovate and think about accessibility differently
- To share our experiences of applying human-centered design as a kind of case study to spark conversation around digital innovation within the sector

Here are the different ways in which you might find this report relevant:

- For those working in an arts organization, this report offers a case study of adopting a design thinking mindset and the human-centered design approach to improve

accessibility in the arts for D/deaf and disabled artists and patrons.

- For designers and researchers who are interested in issues of access, this report offers insights that were generated out of our user research activities, and some reflections on how to adopt a difference-led design and research approach.

- For those who are D/deaf and disabled artists or patrons, this report will offer a snapshot of the community's feelings and reactions at the beginning of the pandemic in 2020.

- For those who are involved in providing accessibility programs and services, this report will offer some insights on critical access, and ideas on how you might apply it in your work.

We hope that this report will give you some new perspectives on the issue of inaccessibility in the arts. We further hope that it will give you the confidence and the knowledge that creating impactful digital solutions does not actually begin with the technology, but rather with listening carefully to people's needs and stories.

What is Accessing The Arts?

Accessing the Arts is a research and development initiative that aims to amplify D/deaf and disability culture online to make discoverable for the public, a truly inclusive arts culture.

We are working with communities and arts organizations across Canada, co-creating and designing solutions in the sector that remove barriers in the arts and create more opportunities for D/deaf and disabled people to connect to and access the arts in a digital world.

Our goals are:

- To build opportunities for communities to co-create and design innovative solutions that make Canada's arts and culture sector more accessible.
- To deliver daily and accurate updates to underserved communities across Canada about accessible events and opportunities in their region.
- To make D/deaf and disability culture visible and discoverable and broaden awareness of new accessibility policies and practices.
- To connect artists and arts leaders to the resources, knowledge, and opportunities they need most to create and innovate.

Our contributing partners include:

Tangled Art + Disability, Live Describe, Deaf Spectrum, Inside Out Theatre, Luminato Festival, Young People's Theatre, Why Not Theatre, Nightwood Theatre, Theatre Passe Muraille, Theatre Local, the Toronto Fringe Festival, VocalEye, Inclusive Design Research Centre (OCAD

University), Culture Creates, Accessibility Cloud, Critical Distance, The British Council, Royal Conservatory, Humber Institute of Technology and Advanced Learning, Ryerson University's School of Disability Studies, User Experience Design Program at University of Toronto's iSchool, Bodies in Translation: Activist Art, Technology and Access to Life, and Re•Vision: The Centre for Art and Social Justice.

Timeline of Key Design Research Activities

Accessing The Arts has engaged in a variety of design and research activities, many with support and input from the University of Guelph's ReVision Centre for Art and Social Justice, and Bodies in Translation: Activist Art, Technology and Access to Life at Ryerson University's School of Disability Studies.

We have been using all the data gathered from focus groups, interviews and usability testing to support the human-centered design process that informed the development of the ATA Platform's scope and vision. The literature review, which was conducted independently from our design research activities, offered further validation of our user research findings and insights.

Below is a timeline that highlights key design research activities:

- June-Aug 2019: Research planning with academic partners at the University of Guelph
- Sept-Dec 2019: Developing low-fidelity wireframes to explore what kinds of accessibility information may be useful in an art event listing
- Jan-Feb 2020: Developing a functional prototype based on wireframes
- Mar 2020: Conducting usability testing of functional prototype to gather user feedback
- April-May 2020: Conducting COVID-19 Focus Groups as part of user research activities
- June-Aug 2020: Generating design research recommendations for ATA Platform
- June-Nov 2020: Conducting literature review of research on the information needs of D/deaf and disabled individuals, and on human-centered design practices, with a particular focus on the arts and culture context
- Nov 2020: Conducting Human-Centered Design Workshops
- Jan-Mar 2021: Emergence of Difference-Centered Design, Writing of Final Report

A Vision for the ATA Platform

Our design research process led us to develop a new vision for the ATA platform. It was a departure from what was originally imagined as an event listing service that offers more useful accessibility-related information for D/deaf and disabled patrons. Our vision today is one driven by a central insight that was never explicitly articulated by research participants, but permeated throughout our activities: **that the disability arts community exists in spirit, but lacks a strong physical presence, or a centralized digital presence.**

At present, the design of the ATA Platform focuses on fostering interconnectedness between the arts community-at-large and the disability arts community. It is envisioned as a hub that works on connecting community members through their own lived experiences, which will then foster relationships through shared common experiences. Creating a space where shared knowledge may flow can be very valuable and essential in community building. The ATA platform aims to become a safe space where community members can connect, transform and *be* transformed by each other.

Currently, Creative Users Projects is engaging in a prototyping initiative called Network Connector to begin addressing this core issue while we gather additional resources to develop our full vision for the ATA platform.

What is Difference-Centered Design?

Difference-Centered Design describes the way that Accessing The Arts has applied the idea of critical access to the human-centered design process. Human-Centered Design is a creative way to explore problems and come up with solutions. It helps us come up with the best solutions by focusing on three things:

- the needs of people
- the resources available, and
- the technologies that are accessible.

To practice human-centered design well, we need people who are great at understanding the users' needs, people who are good at planning projects, and people that like to work with technology. They should also have a "design thinking" mindset, which means being open to possibilities and using their creativity to see things differently.

The stories and experiences of D/deaf and disabled people are not often heard or shared. Critical access describes what happens when we make sure that we listen closely to those stories and experiences. It encourages us to explore what happens when we centre D/deaf and disabled people, their culture and their politics while designing access.

Consistent with this practice, this report does not offer a checklist of things that arts organizations can do to improve accessibility in the arts. Rather, the insights are presented in a way that facilitates personal reflection and dialogue with D/deaf and disabled stakeholders in your community.

When we put the idea of critical access and human-centered design together, we can make sure that their voices and experiences of D/deaf and disabled people are at the centre of our problem-solving process.

Part 2: Summary of Research Insights

The research insights shared in this report are based on the focus groups conducted in the spring of 2020, just after the COVID-19 pandemic began. These insights were further developed in collaboration with academic partners and arts organizations who have an interest in improving access to the arts.

Key Learnings from COVID-19 Focus Groups

While Accessing The Arts began with the idea that increasing the availability of accessibility information on art event listings can help improve access to the arts, the focus groups got us thinking about the problem we wanted to solve in different ways.

Following are the "aha" moments that directly shaped the way we envisioned the ATA platform.

1. **Data first or people first?** Information about the accessibility of an event or venue is important for access, but not the first barrier to overcome; personal experiences have reinforced the belief that artistic experiences were not created with D/deaf and disabled people in mind, leading many to not seek out artistic experiences at all.

2. **Can a pandemic shake the stigma?** Many focus group participants expressed the surreal experience of seeing the issue of accessibility becoming mainstream, yet still being left out of the conversation, leaving them feeling extra-marginalized.

3. ***Where* is the disability arts community?** Having personal experiences as a D/deaf and disabled artist or art patron validated by others has a tremendously positive impact on the individual, but opportunities for this to happen appear to be lacking. The community exists in spirit, but lacks a strong physical presence, as well as a centralized digital presence.

Key Themes from Focus Group Participants' Stories

After completing the focus groups, we organized all the stories we had heard from 52 D/deaf and disabled artists and patrons, then identified the following themes. You can find summaries of all the stories we heard in Appendix C (forthcoming).

We identified three types of insights that have a broad relevance for a variety of accessibility initiatives within the arts community. They are described below.

1. **Current practices of access have room for improvement.** A number of insights reflect D/deaf and disabled people's thoughts on current access programs and services that are made available by some arts organizations. For example: Access measures being only available by request require a lot of labour to arrange, especially for groups that consist of people with a variety of disabilities. Disabilities that are episodic or fluctuate over time can make it hard to attend art events on the day of.

2. **The transformative power of access.** There are powerful insights indicative of the profound impact that "true" access to the arts can have. Firstly, able-bodied values in our society inadvertently convey and reinforce the idea that the arts are out of reach for D/deaf and disabled individuals. As a result, many D/deaf and disabled people simply assume that artistic experiences are not for them, as the arts have always been presented and experienced as inaccessible. Secondly, making artistic experiences accessible provides the D/deaf or disabled individual with viable options, rather than having that decision made for them.

3. **COVID-19 experiences and access practices.** There has been a collective deepening of grief and frustration experienced by D/deaf and disabled artists and patrons during the COVID-19 pandemic. The increased availability of online artistic experiences has improved access for many, but online programs are not accessible by default. At the same time, the increased awareness of accessibility issues in the broader society has been bittersweet, as the deeply relevant experiences of D/deaf and disabled people remain marginalized. These insights reveal how the exclusion and marginalization of D/deaf and disabled individuals has intensified and reached appalling heights during this time.

Part 3: Accessing The Arts

This section offers a closer look at the journey of Accessing The Arts. It provides details on the design research activities that we engaged in, how our thinking evolved, how we responded to the pandemic, and much more. It is intended to serve as a case study for other arts organizations in Canada and beyond who may be embarking on a similar digital innovation journey of their own.

What is design research?

Design research, human-centered design, and design thinking are different terms that all describe what happens when we bring creativity and critical thinking together.

Design research refers to research that is conducted to generate data and insights that inform design decisions. This can be the design of wayfinding signage, the design of a washing machine, or the design of a chat bot. Depending on the design objectives, different kinds of user data are needed. As such, a design researcher can draw on methodology from any field or discipline that is relevant.

In the context of Accessing The Arts, the purpose of the design research activity was to gain a deeper understanding of the needs of D/deaf and disabled artists and patrons, in order to inform

the design of an event listing service that offered improved accessibility information. We used research methods from the field of information science to gather data about people's information seeking behaviours and practices. We also incorporated concepts from critical disability studies such as crip technoscience and critical access to help inform our analysis.

Human-Centered Design refers to a common innovation practice that offers a holistic framework for developing sustainable solutions to human problems. It centers on three key areas: human desirability, business viability, and tech feasibility.

To support this process, design research insights are used to deepen our understanding of the human needs, and to validate the way we are framing the problem. As ideas emerge for possible solutions to the human problem, we evaluate and assess their viability by conducting an assessment of the business environment, as well as the accessibility of technology that will be used for the people we want to serve.

Design thinking refers broadly to a mindset. It can be described as an individual's ability to engage in both creative and critical thinking, to see a problem from a different vantage point, and to generate a number of different possible solutions. This is the process by which technical, business and even social innovation can happen.

In many ways, this is also the same creative process that artists are already intimately familiar with, just presented in a different language. It is also a process that, if applied as intended, strongly aligns with disability communities' ethos of "Nothing About Us Without Us"[1]. The key difference is in the domains of knowledge that artists, researchers, technologists and others bring to the process.

For Accessing The Arts, engaging in the human-centered design process effectively has involved the collaboration of a multidisciplinary team of designers, researchers, business analysts, and technologists. They all align themselves with the values inherent in the human-centered design process, even though they may have different terms to describe it. Furthermore, everyone is driven to serve the interests of the projects' stakeholders.

As we describe below, whe value of this practice was particularly evident during the Spring 2020 focus groups we conducted immediately after the lockdown in response to COVID-19.

The Mic Drop Moment

It was about a month into Toronto's first COVID-19 lockdown in 2020 when we conducted our first user research activity. We were hoping to gain a deeper understanding of the kinds of information that D/deaf and disabled artists and art patrons would like to see on event listings,

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[1] Charlton, James I. (1998). Nothing about us without us: Disability oppression and empowerment. 1st ed., University of California Press.

and how they would like to get it. We generated findings that made us rethink how we had initially framed the problem.

The "mic drop" moment during our data analysis was when a more urgent problem emerged: **the reality that D/deaf and disabled people regularly assume that art is not for them, and therefore they are not seeking out any artistic experiences to begin with.**

By doing a deep dive on human desirability first, rather than tech feasibility or business viability, we ended up reframing the problem that Accessing The Arts set out to address. We could not fit it all into one problem statement, due to the multi-faceted nature of human experiences, but we identified three priority issues that Accessing The Arts should tackle:

2. **Data first or people first?** Data about the accessibility of an event or venue is important for access, but not the first barrier to overcome; personal experiences have reinforced the belief that artistic experiences were not created with D/deaf and disabled people in mind, leading many to not seek out artistic experiences at all.

4. **Can a pandemic shake the stigma?** Many focus group participants expressed the surreal experience of seeing the issue of accessibility becoming mainstream, yet still being left out of the conversation which leaves them feeling extra-marginalized.

4. ***Where* is the disability arts community?** Having personal experiences as a D/deaf and disabled artist or art patron validated by others has a tremendously positive impact on the individual, but opportunities for this to happen appear to be lacking. The community exists in spirit, but lacks a strong physical presence, as well as a centralized digital presence.

It was this reframing of the problems that led us to rethink what Accessing The Arts as a digital solution could look like.

The Design Research Process

As described earlier, design research is essentially research that is conducted to inform our design decisions. All design research processes begin with gaining a deep understanding of the user needs.

Prior to the start of the project, Creative Users Projects conducted a variety of interviews to gain a deeper understanding of the needs of the disability arts community, and to further explore the problem space. The insights generated were used to create a wireframe, which is a low-fidelity mock-up in the form of an interactive document (such as a PDF) that represented what we imagined the improved online event listing service might look like.

From there, we developed a simple functional prototype that usability testers could access through a web browser from anywhere. This yielded further user insights as we gained a better understanding of how people think and feel as they are navigating some of its basic functions.

All of these insights were used to inform the creation of a design research plan which officially began right at the start of the pandemic. Below is a detailed report of that process, and how it led to new insights about the needs of users, a better understanding of the problem space, and a new vision for what the ATA platform should strive to be.

1 - Identifying the Needs of the Disability Arts Community

The research team organized 10 virtual focus groups to help gather as many voices and insights from the disability community as possible. Each of these sessions consisted of five to six D/deaf and disabled artists/art patrons. By having members of the disability community (many of whom are also artists) facilitate these focus groups, we created a safe online space for discussions. The facilitators incorporated their understanding of the community's needs as they built accessibility considerations (breaks, ASL interpreters, use of chat function, and more) into the programming.

The focus groups themselves created an environment for community-building and bonding between participants, leading many participants to share their contact information at the end of their session. Additionally, participants were informed that there will be future opportunities for them to continue to be engaged throughout the development of the ATA platform. Knowing that the process is ongoing positively impacted people's levels of engagement because they recognized their voices are being heard and respected.

The sections below present a summary of the key findings from the user research and focus groups conducted in the early months of the pandemic - April and May of 2020. These findings are broadly applicable to the design of artistic programs and services through a critical access lens. In other words, we do not spell out specific recommendations for arts organizations, presenters and producers as to how they can improve access in their artistic experiences. Rather, we share some of the stories we heard which we turned into design principles. These principles can be used as a guide for the development of recommendations specific to your unique context and objectives.

Current Practices of Access

The following insights reflect participants' thoughts on current access programs and services that are made available by some arts organizations. Rather than providing specific recommendations on how arts organizations can broadly respond, we encourage you to reflect on your own access practices and engage in dialogue with your D/deaf and disabled stakeholders to see what possible solutions emerge.

> **Insight 1:** When access measures are only available by request rather than by default, D/deaf and disabled patrons have to put in a lot of labour to arrange for access. A group consisting of multiple D/deaf and disabled people requires even more effort. There

needs to be more awareness and recognition of intersecting disabilities in order to develop a breadth of simultaneous access measures.

"A lot of my friends that I use to help me with that are also multiply disabled and have physical and sensory disabilities as well so when I'm looking for events or programming for us to do, we can't go if we're having to take on a big burden of requesting access. Sometimes it's OK if one of us can coordinate it for all of us but if it's not just there, it's really hard to manage because there are a lot of intersecting disabilities just in our group of friends. If there are access features present like ASL, wheelchair access, parking proximity, somebody to act as a sighted guide, flexibility for large print, it all needs to be there for us to even consider it."

Insight 2: Disabilities can be episodic or fluctuate over time, making it difficult for D/deaf and disabled patrons to attend events they were planning to. One potential way to respond to this need is to create a flexible ticket refund, exchange or transfer policy.

"One of the biggest challenges for me is not knowing ahead of time if I'll have a flare up, which would prevent me from being able to attend a ticketed event. And I've been thinking a lot about the ways producers and promoters could incorporate some kind of more open refund policy. Because oftentimes, you know, I might not know up until the day of if I'm actually physically or mentally up to going to a potentially triggering play or something like that, so I find personally with my patterns, I find that I am only really going to things that I can buy at the door, which is frustrating because a lot of the stuff I want to see sells out."

Insight 3: Meaningful negotiation and collaboration are essential to working towards critical access within integrated art settings that feature artists with mixed abilities. Intentional creation of spaces and channels of communication for this to happen should be a priority across an organization.

"In a playwriting workshop, I learned the technical bits and structure around writing. It was a wonderful experience because it was an ASL/English environment, so you could switch back and forth between the two languages. The theatre company was willing to negotiate with the interpreter – negotiate terms, have the discussion, and communicate with them to find out exactly what they needed. That kind of collaboration and working together was a memorable process. As a Deaf person going through that experience, I think I learned so much and they were willing to learn from us. I was very thankful."

The Transformative Power of Access

The following insights demonstrate the profound impact that "true" access to the arts can have for D/deaf and disabled people. They reflect the deeply personal experience of disability, and what any efforts towards improving accessibility in the arts should strive to achieve. Furthermore, the insights point to the untapped potential of an entire community of individuals that has not yet been meaningfully engaged by the arts sector. We believe these insights can

help arts organizations reframe the challenge of accessibility in the arts, and their approach to addressing it.

> **Insight 1:** Able-bodied values in our society inadvertently convey and reinforce the idea that the arts are out of reach for D/deaf and disabled individuals. As a result, many D/deaf and disabled people simply assume that artistic experiences are not for them, as the arts have always been presented and experienced as inaccessible. The increased representation and visibility of D/deaf and disabled artists in the sector opens up a space for individuals to imagine and participate in new disability art practices, which can create a virtuous cycle that reaffirms and increases awareness of disability culture within mainstream arts culture.

> *"I've had to change my artistic practice to be a visual artist because it felt like I couldn't do theatre anymore. But I wanted to still participate in art… once my disability became more mobility related, I really never saw myself on stage... But then, the week before COVID happened, I went and saw Propeller Dance, which is a disabled dance company from Ottawa. They came to Toronto and did a show and it was the first time I've ever seen someone with a mobility device on the stage in that way. That was really impactful for me."*

> **Insight 2:** Making artistic experiences accessible gives choice and autonomy to D/deaf and disabled art patrons. By making an artistic experience accessible, the decision to attend rests with the D/deaf and/or disabled person, rather than having that decision made for them.

> *"By making something accessible, you give that right to them to make that choice. Not everyone is going to like theatre, blind or not, but by making it accessible, you're not choosing for them; they get to choose for themselves."*

COVID-19 Experiences and Access Practices

D/deaf and disabled artists and patrons have been experiencing a collective deepening of grief and frustration during the COVID-19 pandemic. The following insights reveal how the exclusion and marginalization of D/deaf and disabled individuals has intensified and reached appalling heights during this time. They offer additional perspectives on the impact of the pandemic on the D/deaf and disabled community, and can serve as a start for deeper conversations with the various D/deaf and disabled stakeholders in your community as to what we can do in response.

> **Insight 1:** Although interdependence and community building have always been important practices within the D/deaf and disability arts community, they have become especially vital for surviving the COVID-19 crisis.

> *"About the community, I always keep in touch with my fellow artists that belong to the art gallery and we talk on the phone or on Instagram. We see how they're doing. Or planning*

the new (online) show every Friday, so that keeps me busy. But a lot of people say that they are feeling isolated because of this situation at home and we try to talk a lot, you know."

Insight 2: The digital pivot that has emerged in response to the pandemic has increased the availability of online artistic experiences and removed considerable access barriers for many. However, it is important to remember that online programs are not accessible by default.

"I've seen some increased access online around dance classes but there's been a lot of other access questions for me around, like who has access to an accessible home, to bring their chair inside. Who has the space to move around in your chair to dance at home? Who cannot access Internet-based classes at the times that they're being posted live? Then when videos are posted live, a lot of dance companies are not providing any kind of ASL interpretation or captioning and so those inequities for deaf and hard of hearing dancers still persist even as we've transitioned into the pandemic with an online transition."

Insight 3: The increased access experienced by some during the pandemic has been bittersweet. D/deaf and disabled people, who had been developing an expertise in accessible programming well before the pandemic, are often not consulted for online artistic programming. It is extremely important for art programmers to practice a critical access approach in collaboration with their D/deaf and disabled stakeholders.

"It's just that now that everyone needs to live inside for a period of time, now they start caring more about access and accessible technologies and kind of like prying it out of our hands without giving us credit for setting this stuff up."

Insight 4: D/deaf and disabled individuals have always had to face ableist, exclusionary policies that present them as undesirable and even dispensable. However, the triage protocols during the COVID-19 pandemic have made the community's experience of this crisis especially traumatizing.

"You get the feeling that you're not very valuable in small ways on a daily basis or very frequently interacting with different spaces, but especially the healthcare system. But to have it not only stated so explicitly, but being unquestioned, that it's normal and okay and just a given that you wouldn't pour resources into saving somebody who is already disabled. It's so hurtful. I had to start trying to limit certain conversations with people who are just trying to understand and mean well, but it really upsets me having conversations where I'm asked to defend or to explain why…. I've started to use the word traumatic."

2 - Prototyping a Solution (and Learning From It)

A prototype is like a hypothesis or an experiment that you put out into the world so you can learn from the responses that it creates. In this way, the prototyping process does not always need to involve technology. It can involve something as simple as a series of role playing activities.

The research findings in this section adopt language that is commonly used by design researchers, product and service designers, and others in the creative industries. Since we recognize that the terminology may be unfamiliar for some arts and culture workers, we have included definitions wherever needed.

Between late 2019 and early 2020, the ATA team created paper wireframes to visualize how we imagined users would create user accounts, event listings, and contribute accessibility information for specific events as well as venues. These were turned into a basic functional prototype for usability testing purposes. This prototype allowed users to create an arts organization profile and venue profiles, as well as to add accessibility information to existing venue profiles.

Even with such a simple prototype, we received a wide variety of responses. These led us to generate insights that were foundational in helping us reframe the problem of inaccessibility in the arts, and by extension, its possible solutions.

We invited representatives from partnering arts organizations to complete a few tasks, and then "talk aloud" to share with us what they were thinking as they navigated the prototype to complete their tasks. We also reserved time for open-ended discussions. For a more detailed description of the research method, please see Appendix B (forthcoming).

The findings are organized in terms of the new insights we gained about user needs and how they helped us refine the way we approached the design problem.

Refining the Personas

Personas are general descriptions of key types of target users. Personas include various pieces of information such as users' information needs, motivations, behaviours and goals. During the usability testing session, we were paying particular attention to how people liked to get information about the accessibility of an event, their approach to defining their own accessibility needs, and how they would like the information to be made available to them. We also wanted to understand how information about the accessibility of an event was generated, how it was maintained and how it was communicated to the public.

What we learned is that the information needs of arts organizations vary greatly depending on whether they are a service organization that serves a specific artistic community, or a producing organization that engages the public directly. Furthermore, organizations have specific mandates that range from broadly advocating for or championing accessibility issues within

their work, to outwardly identifying and cultivating audiences that have bumped up against inaccessibility in the arts.

From the research data we collected through usability testing, we identified three distinct purposes that can be associated with an entire arts organization or a specific individual:

- **Presenters** are most concerned with the production aspects of making an artwork available to the public. When they are creating a plan for a festival or a tour, they begin by identifying venues that will meet certain physical access requirements. The list of venues are further narrowed down based on the specific needs of the production, such as the accessibility requirements of the performers and the target audience (i.e. ASL interpretation, live captioning, etc.).

- **Marketers** are focused on promoting accessible artistic experiences to D/deaf and disabled communities. When they are creating a marketing plan for a show, they need to be able identify the specific group(s) or market segments that they want to reach, and the channels through which to engage them.

- **Connectors** are focused on finding and sharing information about access in the arts. Depending on their specific community or network (and they may be a network of networks), the types of information could include, but are not limited to, accessible artistic events, availability of accessible artistic spaces, opportunities for professional engagement or artistic collaboration, and professional development opportunities.

Further questions around the needs of D/deaf and disabled patrons and artists emerged out of our usability research activity:

- From the art patron's perspective, what do they want to get out of engaging with the arts?
- From the artist's/creator's perspective, what do they need in order to create works of art?
- How do members of the disability arts community find and connect with each other?

Refining the Design Problem

Based on these new insights into the information practices of target users, we also developed new ways of approaching the design problem that takes them into account. This helped us reframe the problem of accessibility in the arts, and by extension, its possible solutions. Below we mention two solutions in particular for the role they played in helping us define our approach to the design problem.

Thinking of Users as Information Contributors Instead of Highlighting Their Arts-based Roles

In this simple prototype, each participant was invited to create a profile as an arts organization, create new records for venues, and also contribute to existing venue records. However, we realized that the titles and roles people identify with in real life (such as artist, arts patron, or representative of an arts organization) might not be useful in delineating the types of information they can contribute, and how we track or evaluate the accuracy of that information.

For example, would someone who works for an organization be creating a profile for themselves as an individual, or on behalf of their organization? If the latter is true, what happens when that individual moves on? If we are attributing specific accessibility information to specific user profiles, will the attribution follow the individual or the organization?

Considering the Accessibility Needs of Individuals rather than the Accessibility Features of a Space

We had recognized early on that the way we define and organize accessibility information has a lot of nuance, but it was hard to pinpoint how we should go about improving it. We did what came most naturally to us, which was to increase the types of accessibility information that should appear on typical event listings.

As a user was creating a new record for a venue on our prototype, they were presented with a list of about a dozen options to check off. The list was not comprehensive but offered a broad selection. Participants found the list lacking but in different ways. They all wanted the available options to be much more specific, but they also recognized that an endless check-list was not an effective solution.

The feedback from the participants shifted our approach to designing the solution from how we can best represent accessibility features of a physical space or a performance in order for them to be found, to how we can best help individuals represent their accessibility needs, and matching them up with the spaces and events that are most likely to be accessible to them.

3 - Engaging with Critical Access

Our engagement with academic partners rooted in critical disability studies has infused important nuance into our understanding of access.

Academic research can provide leading indicators of what we might see in terms of impact 10 to -20 years down the road. Just as this is true of technological innovation, it is also true of social innovation. Accessing The Arts has created a unique opportunity to put emerging research into practice, and conversely, to have the community drive the direction of academic research.

Our academic partners include the teams at ReVision Centre for Art and Social Justice at the University of Guelph, and the School of Disability Studies at Ryerson University, which is the first

degree-granting program in Canada that is exclusively about disability studies. Both are founded on a long-standing relationship with Creative Users Projects over many years.

It is these symbiotic relationships that have made the design research process such a generative one and helped us develop and apply our understanding of critical access.

Traditionally, access practices try to accommodate D/deaf and disabled individuals into the normative world, often using a standardized, check-list approach that does little to challenge the broader culture of ableism. In contrast, what Aimi Hamraie describes as "critical access" is a practice that mobilizes the knowledge carried by D/deaf and disabled people to co-design access practices led by their politics.

At their core, critical access practices are iterative, frictional, and experimental[2] - characteristics that we believe align well with the principles of human-centered design. It is this dialogue between the two that has helped us lay the foundation for the development of Difference-Centered-Design.

4 - A New Vision for the ATA Platform

One of the most rewarding moments of going through an emergent process of discovery and learning, is arriving at a place of elegant clarity. For a solution to have impact, it need not be complex. Very often, the most effective solutions are the ones that draw on our strengths, rally our supporters, and respond to some of our most fundamental human needs.

Through this design research process, we developed a new vision for the ATA platform that is very different from the event listing service that we originally thought it would be. It is one driven by a central insight that was never explicitly articulated, but permeated throughout: **that the disability arts community exists in spirit, but sorely lacks a strong physical presence, or a centralized digital presence.**

At present, the design of the ATA Platform focuses on strengthening the connections within the disability arts community across Canada, while also more effectively connecting them with the arts community-at-large. We want to do this by designing a cycle of information sharing and knowledge creation that can help create community-based solutions as well as foster a knowledge-based environment where community members have access to the information that they require.

In order to foster a safe and supportive digital space, it is important for these communities to exchange information and personal experiences in an intuitive and meaningful way. With the intervention of the ATA platform, we can see how knowledge and resources are able to flow in

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[2] Hamraie, A. (2017). Building access: Universal design and the politics of disability. University of Minnesota Press.
Hamraie, A. & K. Fritsch. (2019). Crip technoscience manifesto. Catalyst: Feminism, theory, technoscience 5(1), 1-33.

an organic and efficient way, allowing both communities to have access to one another while also building trust with one another.

We envision the ATA platform as a hub that works on connecting community members through their own lived experiences, which will then foster relationships through shared common experiences. Creating a space where shared knowledge may flow can be very valuable and essential for community building. The ATA platform aims to become a safe space where community members can connect, transform and *be* transformed by each other.

The Central Role of Stories

A bigger disconnect is mainstream society's knowledge gap of the lived experiences of D/deaf and disabled individuals, and conversely, why issues of accessibility are non-obvious for abled-bodied individuals. To bridge these gaps, we need narratives and stories to establish a common language.

While facts and statistics about disability are useful, they oversimplify the multi-faceted nature of human experiences. Taken on their own, statistics also tend to lead to mass solutions that involve relatively straightforward accommodations. This can further marginalize those within the disability community who have intersectional identities, experience multiple disabilities, face economic or class marginalization and other systemic barriers.

With stories, however, we can start to unpack the nuances, making visible the inner experiences of D/deaf and disabled artists and art patrons. This is not only a way to create a stronger identity for the disability arts community, but it can also challenge the ableist assumptions that art is out of reach for the disability community.

Through effective moderation, curation and ethical use of data-driven solutions, we can define specific contexts in which these stories are solicited, shared and engaged with, for the purpose of shifting mindsets. Such cultural shifts happen one person at a time, but at critical mass, these stories can be woven together into a collective narrative about the disability arts community, which will address many of the gaps that statistics and facts leave wanting.

Stories are also a powerful tool for building empathy, so we are creating a trusted process by which individuals feel safe in sharing their stories for a greater good. Given that massive culture shifts are needed before many of the community's ideas about accessibility in the arts can be realized, getting these stories out is in fact critical to any of it being possible.

Next Steps

Currently, Creative Users Projects is engaging with the community in a digital prototyping initiative called Network Connector to further our design and development process. We have been working with graduate students in the User Experience Design program at the University of Toronto's iSchool since the beginning of 2021, and continue to seek out the partnerships and support needed to realize our vision of this project.

Network Connector currently has 100 members and continues to grow.

Part 4: Towards Difference-Centered Design

Difference-centered design is an emerging practice that has been developed in collaboration with our academic and community partners. It draws on human-centered design practice while placing it in dialogue with critical access praxis.

It is the result of our efforts to be reflective about the design research method itself, to constantly evaluate how effective it is at achieving our objectives, and to iteratively refine our understanding through exchange and dialogue both within the team and with the community.

> "As someone who is a newcomer to the disability arts community, I joined the Accessing The Arts project with an open mind and an open heart. I knew that human-centered design was ideal for this project, but I was conscientious of the fact that I have a lot to learn from the community before I could apply it effectively. " - Margaret Lam, Design Research Lead for ATA

Creative Users Projects already had strong artistic and design roots, so human-centered design was a natural fit with the organization and offered an anchor in what became a highly emergent process. Over time, we developed a variety of ways to describe our process in our efforts to clearly and succinctly communicate it to our research participants.

This is how we began to unpack the ways in which the human-centered design approach can centre D/deaf and disabled people within the design process.

Knowledge Mobilization

Our journey towards difference-centered design began with a desire to more broadly raise awareness of the human-centered design process as an intuitive and arts-friendly practice for arts organizations that are embarking on digital initiatives.

Sharing what the Accessing The Arts team was learning with the community was always an important part of what we do. True to our human-centered approach, we wanted to make sure that we were sharing what the arts community was most interested in.

While the term 'knowledge transfer' or 'knowledge mobilization' is most often used in academic contexts to describe the transmission of research findings into community settings, we have developed our own definition of knowledge mobilization: **It is a cycle of knowledge creation and use that prioritizes community needs first and foremost.**

In this light, research activities should support the creation of community solutions, with the findings communicated in appropriate formats and language that empowers the community to craft an informed response to their own needs.

While we engaged in a variety of design research activities, some of the research findings were relevant specifically to the design of the ATA Platform, but not broadly relevant or "actionable"

for the arts community. To ensure that we were focused in our knowledge mobilization efforts, we reflected on the following:

1. What kinds of knowledge have been generated within this project?
2. Who would be interested in that knowledge? For what purpose?
3. What format will make the content most accessible and actionable for them?

It was during this reflection process that we realized our experience with the human-centered design process in the context of the disability arts community was a significant piece of knowledge that ATA had generated.

Critical Reflection of Human-Centered Design

Since the beginning of this design research process, we were conscientious of the fact that the human-centered design process needs to be applied thoughtfully in a way that puts D/deaf and disabled people at the centre of the whole experience. We asked ourselves a number of questions during the planning process at the beginning, as well as during the smaller planning cycles leading up to specific focus groups, workshops and interviews:

1. Who will be conducting and facilitating the research?

2. How might we best create a psychologically safe environment where focus group participants feel comfortable sharing their stories and opinions?

3. How can we make the design research process as accessible as possible?

4. How do we ensure that participants know their voices are being heard?

These questions were not asked in isolation, and the answers were not always the same depending on the scope of the design research activity. To support this process, we regularly sought out input from trusted advisors who offered perspectives based on their own experiences of living with disability, or their deep experiences of working closely with D/deaf and disabled people.

In November 2020, we conducted two workshops on design thinking, as a way to share our team's experience of applying the human-centered design process, and also to introduce the concept to D/deaf and disabled artists and disability arts organizations.

The feedback we received from those workshops were critical in opening our eyes to some of the ableist assumptions that are inherent in the human-centered design process.

For example, during a rapid ideation activity where participants had to generate as many ideas as possible based on a concept within 1 to 2 minutes, we went around the group to ask people to share the number of ideas they had generated. The purpose of this was to build a sense of

rapport between participants within the workshop, but some shared their feeling that it was competitive and ableist, even though they recognized that this was not the intent.

Carefully reflecting on common facilitation techniques in design thinking workshops is crucial to ensure that the experience of the workshop itself centres crip culture and the experiences of D/deaf and disabled people.

Another example is the concept of prototyping. This is a term that is often referenced as part of interactive experiments that are part of the human-centered design process, and it is regularly associated with the idea of *digital* prototypes. This creates a barrier for many who feel that they do not have the digital knowledge and capacity to engage in prototyping activities.

In reality, a prototype does not need to have digital components, nor does it have to be related to technology at all. Creating opportunities for prototyping without the burden and pressure of engaging with technology is a critical step to engage D/deaf and disabled people in the process.

Moments of clarity such as the two described above motivated us to engage in continuous critical reflection of Accessing The Arts' design research process. It also laid the groundwork for us to imagine what a disability-led human-centered design process could look like.

Personal Reflections

At the end of the design research process, after we have validated our understanding of the users' needs and critically considered the design problem from different perspectives, there is inevitably a moment of transformation that occurs.

This is a moment that will look and feel different every time, depending on the problem you are trying to address, and the people that you are working with. However, it is usually a rewarding moment, as you have placed trust in a process where embracing what you do not know often takes priority over establishing what you do know.

Rather than attempting to describe what that moment of transformation is like, it is perhaps best understood through the personal reflections of those who have experienced this process through their involvement in Accessing The Arts' design research activities.

> *"I may have heard of human-centered design or design thinking but was not familiar with the actual process until I was introduced to it through the focus groups and this workshop. I was really interested in the reframing the question activity (you gave the analogy of Henry Ford and people wanting faster horses). Digging into that more, and learning by doing would be exciting. The sense of competition set up by being asked to share how many ideas we generated in the warm-up exercises (with the goal of generating as much as possible) felt uncomfortable, and is also a goal I associate with ableist values, which I know was not the intent. It was too bad that we ran out of time to complete the last exercise, though meeting for longer than 1.5 hours at a time on Zoom is probably not*

possible for me. It was really helpful for me to do audio-only, though I know that presented some challenges." **Anonymous Workshop Participant**

"Prior to the workshop, I was barely familiar with human-centered design, so it was great to have that outlined. It feels very connected to disability justice. As a leader of a feminist organization, we are really looking into intelligences beyond the brain/intellect/analysis, and into the body, spirit. I think there is some synergy here. I was SO glad to be included but didn't know if there were any objectives/desired outcomes, so that remained a question for me. Though perhaps leaving it open was part of the point." **Andrea Donaldson, Artistic Director, Nightwood Theatre**

"My take on co-design processes and HCD in general is that they reflect a more horizontal approach to creating programs and services--- doing things "with" rather than "for". These processes, when rolled out well, reflect a different kind of engagement, especially when centering folks whose voices tend to be more marginalized. As more organizations move towards better inclusion--- figuring out what that means and learning how to do it--- I think there is a benefit in offering different models of engagement and giving examples of how they can be used. The story of how you (CUP) have specifically applied this design research process would also be a useful reference because it acts as a case study of how this kind of engagement can work from initial idea through carrying out workshops to reflecting the insights and learnings back into programming, services, and even more research questions." **Susan Wolf, Accessibility Manager, Toronto Fringe**

Towards Difference-Centered Design

Together with our academic partners, we are continuing to explore the concept of difference-centered design, and to share the idea in academic circles and community contexts.

Academic Outputs

The findings of our literature review have been published in *Technology in Society* (Volume 65, May 2021), as an academic article called "Toward TechnoAccess: A Narrative Review of Disabled and Aging Experiences of Using Technology to Access the Arts."

In it, we present the findings from our literature review and introduce a new concept called "TechnoAccess," which refers to the practice of difference-centered design by designers and technologists as part of the technology creation process. According to Dr. Carla Rice:

> "TechnoAbleism is a term coined by designer Ashley Shew. It describes technologies that aim to fit D/deaf and disabled bodies and minds into non-accessible environments and understandings. It refers to the idea that technologies designed for D/deaf and disabled people serve ableist desires to fix, overcome, or erase disability. The term describes projects in which technology is designed for, and not by, D/deaf and disabled

people to either erase disability and d/Deafness or remove its possibilities for making change. Our work shows what can happen when D/deaf and disabled people design, develop, and create technology through centering our own needs and desires. We call this process TechnoAccess. It is a process of technological development led by D/deaf and disabled individuals with their encounters with technology and access in mind."

We have organized a panel at the 2021 Society for Disability Studies conference called "Living Online Through the Pandemic: Activist Art, Technology, and Access to Life." Moderated by Dr. Carla Rice, the panel will explore ways that technologies and design practices are being mobilized by disability communities towards creative, emancipatory ends, while critically considering the limitations of these uses and locating them within structures of systemic, intersectional oppression.

We are also developing a feature called "Critical Access as World-making" with a number of co-authors to be published in *Canadian Art* magazine. This piece reflects on the findings of several team projects, including Accessing the Arts, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. In it, we call for radical cultural transformation rather than a return to 'normal,' where access can lead the way into a new world.

A separate companion report for the arts community on the above is currently under development.

Stories of Access Workshops

We recently received additional funding from the Canada Council for the Arts to engage D/deaf and disabled artists with our difference-centered design practice. Starting in Spring 2021, we are launching a pilot series of workshops to work with neurodivergent, D/deaf and low-vision artists in three 6-month long workshops that will be carried out over three years.

The workshop series is entitled "Stories of Access", where the objective is for a small group of artists to engage in the difference-centered design process, generate ideas on how to improve accessibility in the arts, and prototype some of those ideas.

The first one is already kicking off in collaboration with neurodivergent artists at BEING Studio in Ottawa, and we are excited to bring others along on our difference-centered design journey. Our progress will be shared through the Creative Users Projects website and "Connector Weekly" newsletter. We are also seeking collaborators from the D/deaf and low-vision artistic communities to help develop the rest of the workshops.

The first workshop series is also part of a year-long collaboration with Prof. Eliza Chandler (Bodies in Translation, School of Disability Studies, Ryerson University) and her team on an Insight Development Grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council. Their involvement will help us gain a deeper understanding of how access practices and

understandings of access in the arts change when D/deaf and disabled individuals engage in the difference-centered design process.

A Final Word

I want to give the last word to Emily Servais, a key member of the ATA team. She has been working tirelessly alongside Lindsay since the very beginning. This is her reflection on engaging in the human-centered design process over the last two years:

> *The road through the Accessing the Arts project has been full of learning and unlearning, feeling intuitively like we were circling around something really important, and trying out tools, processes and frameworks in an effort to gain more focus on problems and possible solutions. This year brought together the pandemic and human-centred design, which, both in the moment and in hindsight, seemed like a tremendous opportunity to explore and involve people in the process in a way that would have been impossible if we had been limited to gathering in a single physical space. The opportunities to try things out, iterate faster and think creatively about collaborating and receiving feedback as part of the process have guided us to exciting new ideas and possibilities for this work.* **Emily Servais, Communication Manager, Creative Users Projects**

Acknowledgement

Throughout the design research process, there were a number of contributions from different team members. At Octagram, Clair Baleshta and Ellen Taylor conducted the initial coding and analysis of the focus group findings, as well as contributed critical reflections on how to effectively apply human-centered design within the disability context. Sagal Osman helped develop the visual concepts to communicate the vision of the ATA Platform.

 At Creative Users Projects, Kayla Besse offered thoughtful suggestions and edits to an early draft. At The ReVision Centre, Dr. Rana El Kadi provided tremendous support in distilling critical feedback and improving the clarity of our research insights and the overall report.

Beyond the design research activities, there were others who were taking these research insights and turning them into technical solutions. Octagram developed our first functional prototype for usability testing and provided guidance during our early wireframing efforts. Omar Cassim provided a data governance perspective as we explored our role in representing the disability arts community in the development of arts data in Canada.

Emily Servais, Communications Manager at Creative Users Projects deserves a special mention. She is the one that keeps our virtual office humming, the weekly newsletters going, and the community buzzing. She effortlessly makes sure all our virtual sessions have the right accessibility support for participants, and is the keeper of the daily activities that can easily be taken for granted.

A number of ASL interpreters also lended their expertise to the facilitation of our sessions. Special thanks to Cindy Muskat, Kimberley Johnson, Marcia Martins, Melissa Cyr, and Rogue Benjamin.

Behind the scenes, members of Creative Users Projects' board of directors and Accessing The Arts' Research Advisory Committee offered an important sounding board during the early project and research planning phase of the project.

Members of the Research Advisory Committee include Dr. Eliza Chandler, Emily Cook, Loree Erickson, Alex Blumer, Tristan Whiston, Christine Karcza, Robert Tu and Sean Lee. The last four individuals are also Board members along with Deirdre Logue.   Even as they were responding to the dramatic turn as we entered into lockdown in March of 2020, they selflessly made the time to support our efforts to do the same.

In particular, we are deeply grateful for the tremendous influence and impact that the late Christine Karcza has had on shaping this project. Her spirit runs through it, and we dedicate this report to her.

About the Authors

Margaret Lam (MISt) is the Design Research Lead at Creative Users Projects. She is a published information science researcher, a seasoned print and digital designer, and an advocate for independent artists. Her SSHRC-funded research on music knowledge-sharing platforms and the design of domain-specific information systems has been published as journal articles, a book chapter, and presented at conferences on knowledge management, information professionals, ethnomusicology, and digital futures around the world.

As the Design Research Lead at Octagram, a software consultancy in Canada, she consults and advises on numerous strategic digital initiatives, where she brings a nuanced understanding of how human-centered design practices can inform social innovation and digital transformation within the arts and culture sector. Select projects include CAPACOA's Linked Digital Future Initiative, ArtsPond's Hatch Open, The Pitch: Online Showcasing for the Performing Arts, and Twillingate's Digital Arts and Culture Strategy. She is the founder of BeMused Network, and also the co-founder of the Digital Arts Services Symposium and DigitalASO with Jessa Agilo.

Dr. Rana El Kadi is a Research Associate with the Accessing The Arts project. Over the past decade, she has been working alongside communities with lived experience of disability and difference to amplify their voices and co-design arts programs and practices. She is the co-founder of Emergent Futures CoLab (EFC), a transnational collective of artists, scholars, and activists who work on collaborative projects that channel uncertainty and reimagine more equitable futures with their communities. As co-curator of EFC's *Talking Uncertainty* series, she is using cutting-edge storytelling and design tools to mobilize knowledge and build activist solidarities that transcend artistic and academic boundaries.

Rana was recently the Research Lead on Direct[Message], a project that is co-designing a digital prototype that makes the arts more accessible for older adults in Ontario. During her PhD program at the University of Alberta, she conducted a SSHRC-funded ethnographic project where she co-created and facilitated ethnomusicology programs with immigrant and refugee youth around anti-racism and intercultural dialogue. Her presentation of this arts-based critical pedagogy earned her the Bess Lomax Hawes Award in Applied Ethnomusicology. Her earlier research on the politics of inter-sectarian music-making in Lebanon has been published in an academic journal and an edited book on improvisation in the aftermath of war and colonialism.

About Creative Users Projects

Creative Users Projects is a shapeshifter, cultural connector, and sector builder of disability and difference in Canada. Our vision is to spark new ideas of difference and help communities activate more inclusive spaces.

Our Mission

As a disability-led, national arts service organization, our community programs, and online platform connect people to cultural knowledge, resources, and accessible opportunities with the goal of helping artists and arts leaders build stronger and more inclusive communities.

Making difference discoverable & vital
We expand the ways we represent our bodies, our experiences, and our practices in a world that's transforming to digital. To do this, we're working with communities across Canada in the co-creation of a strategy that makes difference discoverable and vital in a digital society.

Connecting communities & breaking silos
Communities are where people can share their stories and connect in ways that transform how we see ourselves and others. We connect people to opportunities that strengthen community, cultivate collaboration, mobilize knowledge, and form unlikely connections.

Building stronger & more inclusive sectors
We help artists and arts organizations with limited tools and resources to reach new audiences and remove barriers in the arts. As a forum and online platform, we connect people to cultural knowledge, and accessible events and opportunities to help artists and arts leaders build a strong and inclusive arts sector.

Our Founder and Director

As a woman with lived experiences of disability, Lindsay's trajectory through the arts is motivated by a desire to build more opportunities and spaces for difference to spark curiosity, creativity and connection.

When she's not at Creative Users, Lindsay's working with researchers, artists, and community members at Bodies in Translation: Activist Art, Technology, and Access to Life (BIT), a University of Guelph SSHRC funded research project. As an artistic producer, she helps build collaborative partnerships between artists, organizations, activists, and educators to open dialogue about charged and difficult topics related to disability and difference.

She has a background as a multidisciplinary artist, curator, and designer. She studied fine art at ECIAD University (Vancouver), completing with BFA in 2003. She then later went on to complete her BDes in design at OCAD University with interest in utilizing creative and strategic thinking to problem-solve alongside communities and help make the world a better place to live.

Appendix A: Design Research Method
Appendix B: Usability Testing Method
Appendix C: Summaries of Workshop Stories

Forthcoming at a later date. Subscribe to our newsletter for updates: http://eepurl.com/dnfmCX