



TRUSTEES' ANNUAL REPORT

ZOOCO

1 APRIL 2024 - 31 MARCH 2025

CHARITY NUMBER 1186349

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ABOUT ZOOCO

ZOOCO

Zoo Co is a multi-award winning theatre company based in Croydon. We're a Registered Charity, and an Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation. We make innovative, bold, electric live theatre for audiences across the UK and around the world.

At our core, we set out to make theatre which responds to what is alive in us as artists, and in our communities. We use bold, playful, highly visual, ensemble-led and democratic approaches to co-create our shows with the artists and communities involved. Our creative practice includes improvisation, Open Space, devising, and the development of new writing.

We share our practice in every creative project, from our professional rehearsal rooms to our community projects. The Zoo Co Young Company is led by the Artistic Director, and co-creates ambitious studio shows alongside professional artists each year.

We believe that theatre is better when everyone is invited. We champion creative access, working with deaf and disabled artists as leaders on every project. We create all of our shows 'Relaxed as Standard', and our productions strive to deliver creatively integrated access for deaf, disabled, neurodiverse and Visually Impaired audiences using integrated sign language, creative captioning, audio description and other technologies, responding to what is creatively enriching for the story, artists and audiences we are working with on each project.

We share our access practice through training, consultancy and advocacy in the industry, in Croydon and nationally. In 24-25, we developed our Neurodiversity Awareness Training, and delivered sessions with Harbottle & Lewis, Barbican, South London Gallery, ThickSkin and Boundless.

Zoo Co is generously supported by Arts Council England. We are also proud to have received funding from Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, the Vogue World Fund, and Place Partnerships via Stanley Arts.

CHARITABLE AIMS

Our Charitable Aims are to advance public education and appreciation of the arts, in particular but not exclusively:

- Through the presentation of performances and the development of new work
- By developing accessibility in the arts through innovative, tailored engagement programmes for marginalised groups or individuals in particular:
 - Young people aged 7-21
 - Deaf and disabled audiences and participants
- Through the provision of theatre in theatre venues or other performance spaces

The Trustees are satisfied that Zoo Co continues to serve these goals to achieve public benefit during this period, in line with guidance from the Charity Commission.



OUR MISSION

ZOOCO

01

RELEVANT PRODUCTIONS:

To create highly innovative, relevant, ambitious and visual live productions for local and national touring, amplifying stories from marginalised people in our communities, using co-creation and community consultation.

02

ACCESS CHAMPIONS:

To champion access across all our activities, celebrating its immense creative and social impact and sharing our creative access methodology with the wider industry.

03

SERVING CROYDON:

To empower children, young people and adults in Croydon to be creative, using co-creation and community consultation to build programmes that are impactful, and informed and led by our diverse doorstep community.



INCLUSIVITY & COMMUNITY

ZOOCO

Founded in 2013 as a company focusing on making visually imaginative work, Zoo Co quickly learnt to blend our theatre practice with the community work we were involved in. In our show *Sirens* in 2018, we worked with a deaf actor and consultant for the first time, and created our first children's show, *Messy*, in partnership with the ADHD Foundation.

Since then, our staff, casts and creative teams began to be majority deaf / disabled / neurodiverse. We became a Registered Charity in 2019 to help us better deliver our work. Now, we focus on empowering deaf / disabled/ neurodivergent people, including young people, to become autonomous decision-makers and co-creators of the work they are making.

We strive for excellence in access provision, which is at the heart of all of our work. All performances have been Relaxed As Standard since 2016 and had integrated BSL (British Sign Language) since 2018.

We strive to serve our local community in Croydon. In 23-24 we were deeply embedded in Croydon's year as Borough of Culture; our show *Night Shift* was a programme highlight, and we took the role of Access Lead.

This has been followed by a year of legacy building:

- Continued access consultancy for events and organisations
- Growing use of our Access Resources Library
- Involvement in the formation of the new CIC Croydon Makers and Creators.

We're proud residents of Stanley Arts, alongside fellow NPOs Stanley Arts and Boundless Theatre, the incredible dance company Birdgang, furniture restorers, a graphic novelist, a reiki healer and a personal trainer!

Shared space offers all kinds of opportunities; in a tough financial climate, sharing resources, expertise and personnel is key - to survive, and to thrive.

It's incredible to be part of this diverse and bustling cultural hub for Croydon, in a heritage building moving through a beautiful, careful restoration to make it more welcoming and accessible for everyone.



LETTER FROM OUR CHAIR

ZOOCO

This year marked our second as an Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation, and it has been one of both celebration and looking to the future.

A major highlight was taking Perfect Show for Rachel beyond London for the first time, opening Brighton Festival 2024 under Frank Cottrell-Boyce's beautifully hopeful theme, Dream Again. It was a milestone moment for Zoo Co and a joyful way to share the show with new audiences.



We were also delighted to welcome three new Trustees - Folarin Akinmade, Jen Pearce and Nick Sweeting - whose experience and insight strengthen the board at an exciting moment in Zoo Co's journey.

Perfect Show for Rachel continues to be a wonderful endeavour - Flo often calls it 'a beautiful inconvenience' - and holding this colourful, noisy, generous show has shaped much of 24-25. At the same time, the year also needed to mark our turn towards the future. I'm proud of the team for carving out space for slow, quiet, generative R&D periods. In these moments we saw the first sparks of Zoo Co's next slate of work, and I'm thrilled to watch these ideas grow.

We remain deeply grateful to organisations such as the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, who have enabled us to focus on long term sustainability and who understand that a secure foundation enables us to deliver ambitious projects with care and confidence.

We are equally thankful to the individuals who champion Zoo Co - from those whose pledges underpinned a successful Big Give campaign to those who choose to support us monthly. Your belief in our work sustains us and shapes what we can imagine next.

Ellie Claughton

Chair of Trustees
November 2025

GRANTS AWARDED

ZOOCO

Esmée Fairbairn Foundation (Creative Confident Communities Year 2 of 3)	£40,000
Vogue World Fund	£12,262
Stanley Arts - Place Partnerships Grant (Final Instalment)	£5,000
Stanley Arts - Culture Croydon Grant	£2,500
Anonymous Trust	£1,000
Quartet Community Foundation	£500



DONATIONS & SALES

Ticket Sales & Producing Fees	£8,255
Access Consultancy	£7,885
Neurodiversity Awareness Training	£7,362
The Big Give Trust (with Gift Aid)	£5,013
Supporters Scheme, Individual Giving & Gift Aid	£3,016
Other Consulting	£1,100

PERFECT SHOW FOR RACHEL BRIGHTON FESTIVAL & BARBICAN

ZOOCO

Perfect Show for Rachel enjoyed appearances at two venues - opening up the Brighton Festival, and returning to the Barbican for another sell-out run. Performances were electric, with standing ovations at every single show.

We continued to adapt and flex the content of the show, learning from Rachel's evolving taste and creating new moments in response. We were so delighted to have been able to open Rachel's world up to new audiences outside London, and to return to the show's original home.

SHOWS IN BRIGHTON

5

SHOWS AT BARBICAN

15

TOTAL AUDIENCE

3,285

AUDIENCE WHO IDENTIFIED AS DEAF OR DISABLED

19%

AUDIENCE WHO IDENTIFIED AS NEURODIVERGENT

24%



AUDIENCE FEEDBACK

Gloriously welcoming and comforting and funny. I felt so relaxed and involved. How theatre should be!! Brilliant performers and concept and production. Thanks for bringing this to Brighton.

A fantastic night of inclusive theatre and an education in how to see the world through the eyes of others. I laughed, cried, whooped and danced all the way to the deserved standing ovation. An incredible concept, cast and craft. Thank you Zoo CO and thank you for letting us into your world for an evening Rachel!

Full of life, silliness and joy, Perfect Show For Rachel also asks some deeper and more challenging questions about the purpose of live theatre, the role of a director, and what we expect from entertainment. Also there's a good amount of fart jokes, so all the bases are well-covered.



In January 2025, we submitted an Expression of Interest for Arts Council England National Lottery funding to support a 7 venue tour of Perfect Show for Rachel. In May 2025, after a full application process, we were delighted to learn we had been successful. In 25-26, the show will tour to Sheffield Theatres, Leeds Playhouse, Oxford Playhouse and Birmingham Rep amongst others.

SOME MORE PEEKS INTO RACHEL'S WORLD

DIGITAL CULTURE AWARD WIN

We were delighted to be joint winners of the Digital Inclusion Award at the Digital Culture Awards, alongside Extant.

We won for the thinking and design behind Rachel's accessible tech desk, and all the other ways accessibility and inclusion are woven into the fabric of Perfect Show:

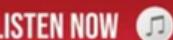
Digital Culture Awards Winners

CLICK HERE



You can listen to Flo and Amy on a podcast about the award here

LISTEN NOW



Amy Smith & Flo O'Mahony
Zoo Co



Digital
Culture
Podcast



YOUNG COMPANY

ZOOCO

Co-creation sessions:	39
Attendances:	192
Young people taking part in final show:	9 (8 CAST + ASSISTANT DIRECTOR)
YoCo graduates taking on paid roles:	1
Number of performances:	2

ROOTED



After a year of deep work devising and creating, Zoo Co's Young Company presented Rooted - a new play devised by the company and written by Liv Ello - on 31 July and 1 August. The Company performed the show at the Omnibus Theatre in Clapham to an audience of friends, family, and representatives from Croydon Council, ACE, the Brit School and Company 3.

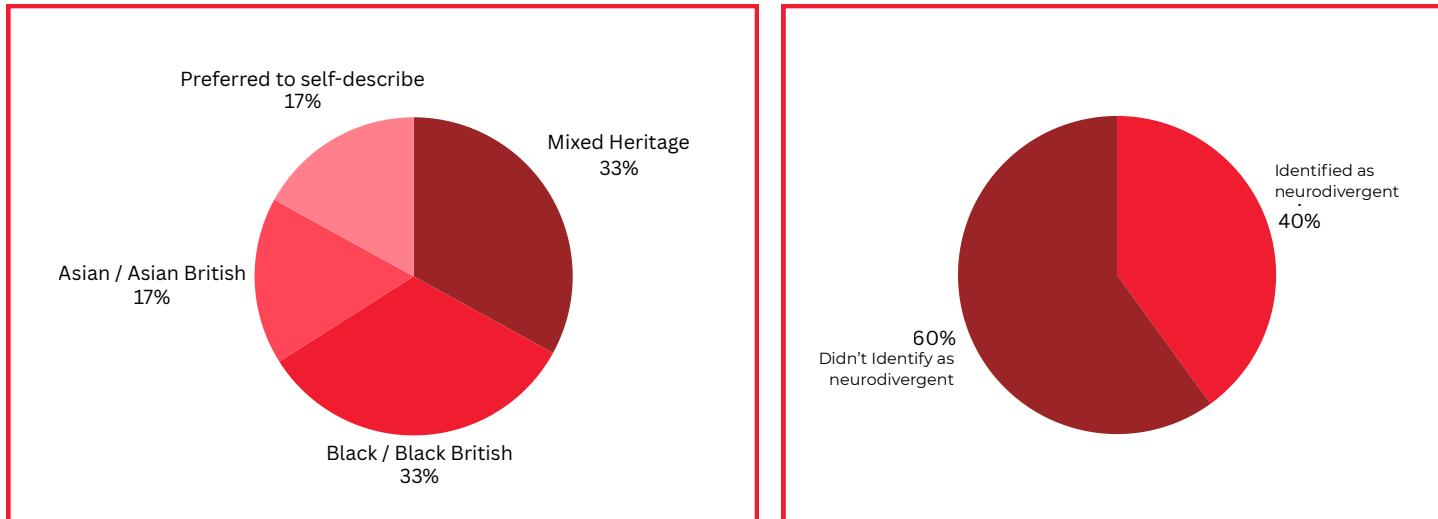


The Company included a cast of 8, as well as a new young person joining us as Assistant Director on work experience from Brit School, which established our new offer of two work experience placements each year for students in Year 10 and 11.

We were also delighted to have YoCo graduate Seraphina Denton join the production as Assistant Stage Manager on a paid contract. We're keen to develop the pipeline into paid professional work for our YoCo members; Seraphina supporting Rooted and coming back to support the YoCo production felt like a homecoming. In January 2025 we also welcomed another YoCo grad, Aïko Foueillis-Mosé, as a Young Associate. She joined us on R&Ds and at our Cabaret night Don't Feed the Penguin, and we're proud to support this young artist as she starts her professional career.

We continued developing our relationship with Coulsdon College, running 3 workshops there, and were also proud to work with learning disabled students from Orpheus College, St Piers and Access All Areas.

Demographics 24-25 :



What the young people said:

Performing the show was wonderful - everyone was so committed to what they had to do, and we had each other's backs. It was a lovely, safe, held, supportive feeling we'd created as a young company.

It's a really great opportunity because of how the open space works - I'm so used to being in a high expectations environment but it's chill and accessible to anyone who is based in and around Croydon.

A great way to meet other people my age and make important connections.

Everything was so relaxed and chill, they gave you the space you needed and they definitely make you feel protected.

I think it's great, because we are such a community. Everyone is accepted, and everyone plays a role, and that enriches our work.

CITIES EXCHANGE & YOCO'S 2025 SHOW

We started conversations with Company Three in September 2024 about a partnership project for the year. The Cities Exchange project brought four youth theatres from Croydon, Islington, Liverpool, Plymouth and Exeter together to create four brand new plays. Using 'Cities' as the starting prompt, the project asked 'What are young people's stories, experiences and perspectives about growing up in their city?'

In February, the companies came together for a residential – a chance for them to make connections with young people from other cities and other experiences and to share creative practice. This project will culminate in a sharing of new plays in each city- including the development of our next YoCo production in summer 2025.

PLAY & COMMUNITY CREATIVE RESEARCH LAB

ZOO CO

BORE PLACE RESIDENTIAL: CREATIVE RESEARCH LAB 16 - 19 SEPT

Zoo Co invited a group of deaf and hearing performers to work with Improbable at Bore Place in Kent, exploring how to make improv practices and instant acting more accessible to deaf creatives.

The thinking for the residential came out of the theme for our year- "becoming the nerds of our own process". The residential aspect mattered; we communed around food, fires and storytelling as well as the work itself. Some strands of our work really benefit from this type of working practice - slowing down, treating people kindly, and building true sense of 'community'. The work was richer and deeper for it.

Learnings from the residential fed into short new work R&Ds that we held through the last half of the year and will continue to be developed. It was liberating to discover that this work translates far beyond the residential into our rehearsal rooms and our working practice.

ARTIST FEEDBACK

Thank you for allowing us to have a safe place and not worry about right or wrong because we need to do the wrong things to see if it works or how we can improve, etc.

I feel very grateful to be here. It's been such a relief not to have to talk about access all the time. You've taken the burden, the responsibility of the translation work off the shoulders of the deaf actors, and put it in the middle for us all to work on together. Then as we look at the problem in the middle, the answers and the work and the responsibility melts back into all of us, and brings us together.

Ess Grange at Improbable produced a [zine](#) in response to the Bore Place Residential - a reminder that artistic responses are a rich evaluation resource, as well as numbers and percentages



DON'T FEED THE PENGUIN

We revived our 'Cabaret Night Gone Feral' Don't Feed the Penguin in the Main Hall at Stanley Arts in November 2025. Hosting a disabled, queer night in Croydon felt beautiful and important - a keystone for community building in our home borough.

ARTIST MAKEUP

- 45%** identified as deaf or disabled
- 33%** identified as neurodivergent
- 22%** lived in Croydon
- 22%** were from the global majority
- 45%** identified as LGBTQI+



ARTIST FEEDBACK

100% agreement 'I felt supported by the organisers'

96% agreement 'this project has contributed to the development of my arts practice'

92% agreement 'this project has helped me to progress my career'

It was one of the most accessible and joyous events I've had the pleasure of being a part of. It was amazing to connect with other excellent deaf and disabled artists.

Loved being part of the show. Felt very thoughtful and inclusive of many different people. Was a joyful evening.

I had such a fantastic time at this event. Whenever I have worked with this company, they have shown exemplary organisational and communication skills. My access requirements were met at all points and I felt secure throughout the process.

AUDIENCE MAKEUP

50% of surveyed audience identified as deaf or disabled

64% of surveyed audience identified as neurodivergent

14% of respondents identified as being from the global majority

94% of respondents rated the night excellent

91% agreement that 'the artists were not afraid to try new things'

20% of respondents were visiting Stanley Arts for the first time

ACCESS SUPPORT & TRAINING

ZOOCO

WORKPLACE NEURODIVERSITY AWARENESS TRAINING

Our role as Access Leads for Croydon's year as Borough of Culture gave us valuable insight into where the gaps are in disability awareness. In response, we developed Neurodiversity Awareness Training, which we offer as a commercial product, with Half Day and Full Day sessions available for workplaces.

Takeup in cultural organisations was immediate and enthusiastic. In 24-25, clients included:

- 64 Million Artists
- ArtAngel
- Barbican Centre
- Boundless Theatre
- Futures Theatre
- Jackson's Lane
- South London Gallery
- ThickSkin
- Wiltshire Creative
- Zoo Nation

We also secured our first client outside the culture sector, delivering a suite of training with law firm Harbottle & Lewis LLP. We'd love to grow this offer and to expand our reach into other industries.

We continue to offer Access Consultancy to arts organisations across the country.

ACCESS LIBRARY:

Now in its second year of operation, the Access Library is in full swing with access equipment being shared out in the Borough and beyond.

Every target we set for the Library has been achieved:

- **334** items loaned
- **20** different organisations (16 of them Croydon-based)
- **63** events
- Benefitting at least **2,500** people.
- Events produced by or hosted at Stanley used our Access Library kit 12 times in 24-25, borrowing **203** items.

We're thinking through a national roll out of the Access Library, with regional hubs (likely theatres and arts centres) storing and administering their own stock of resources to share locally. We will use the 25-26 national tour of Perfect Show to scope interest and talk through logistics with venues. Frozen Light (Norwich) have already expressed an interest in becoming a hub.

We launched the Access Manifesto as part of Croydon's Borough of Culture in July 2023, and continue to advocate for organisations to sign up to its principles. In 24-25, 47 new organisations signed up.

ORGANISATIONAL CHANGES & DEVELOPMENT

ZOO CO

OUR WORKFORCE

Our new status as an Arts Council NPO has encouraged greater rigour around our employment data. Zoo Co supports a payroll of 5 people, and freelancers are key contributors to our day-to-day operations, and work with us across Producing, Fundraising and Access Co-ordination.

Between **1 April 2024 - 31 March 2025**:

67 freelancers worked for us (55 in 23-24 - a 22% increase)

- **36%** of these identified as deaf or disabled
- **40%** of these identified as being neurodivergent
- **31%** of these identified as being from the global majority

We had 5 salaried employees:

- **60%** of these identified as deaf or disabled
- **60%** of these identified as being neurodivergent
- **100%** identified as white

We had 8 Trustees

- **13%** of these identified as deaf or disabled
- **50%** of these identified as being neurodivergent
- **37%** of these identified as being from the global majority



Our onstage and backstage presence and our office environment reflects our core value of inclusion and diversity. Emerging creatives with lived experience of deafness and disability can join a safe and welcoming environment, with peers with similar lived experience. Our audiences can see themselves represented onstage, and we welcome new audiences keen to see their stories represented (eg. with integrated BSL).

It should be noted, for balance, that our 5 employed staff are all white people (same as 23-24, with one role changing personnel). Our Leadership Team (ED and AD) both identify as disabled. Our employees are 60% disabled, 60% neurodiverse (same levels as 23-24) which progresses our mission to welcome disabled and neurodivergent stakeholders into creative spaces.

Over the summer we said goodbye to Alannagh Cooke, Project Administrator, and Maria Laumark, Assistant to the Artistic Director. Ruth Newbery-Payton joined the team as Project Administrator in September 2024, with producing responsibility for the Young Company, delivering on marketing and communications, and project support to other key projects on our slate.

After supporting us as Development Director for two years, including through our first year transition to NPO, Tom Ryalls has moved into a consulting capacity; we've welcomed Hannah Thomas to the team as freelance Development Associate with responsibilities around fundraising.



GOVERNANCE

ZOOCO

We gathered in July for a Board and Staff Away Day at Streatham Space Project. We hold these Away Days annually, using Open Space to discuss long-term aims and dreams, and to spend time together building the team.

We have a wonderful Board of Trustees who offer equal parts support and challenge and help make our organisation stronger. We undertook a Trustee Skills Audit in the winter, and through this worked out a recruitment strategy for bringing on new Trustees focusing on:

- **Expertise** in Fundraising, Marketing and Producing
- **Lived experience** of deafness, disability and neurodivergence, and life as an artist working in UK theatre.

In Spring we met a wide range of candidates, were delighted to welcome Folarin Akinmade, Jen Pearce and Nick Sweeting to the Board.

We also brought Emily Norris into the team as our Board Support Worker. Emily joined all Board meetings and the Away Day, providing access support during meetings, and in particular establishing body doubling sessions to read through Board papers in advance of meetings.

TRAINING & DEVELOPMENT

We made Training and Development a priority for the year, and were proud to have been able to support our team to improve their knowledge and skills. We offered BSL training and ran a Neurodiversity Awareness training session for core employees, freelancers and Trustees. We also provided core staff members with an individual training budget to use freely; the range of training undertaken included classes in improv, economics, and BSL.

BSL (British Sign Language)

- Our Artistic Director and Creative Access Director sign to about Level 3
- Exec is learning Level 2
- 1 staff member and 1 Trustee achieved Level 1
- 1 staff member and 3 freelancers working towards Level 1



ASSOCIATESHIPS

We created Associate positions in 2024 in response to recent discussions from freelancers in the industry around the problems barriers they experience: financial precarity, lack of training opportunities, lack of support and little sense of belonging. We offered two key freelancers a retainer equivalent to one day's work a month, and they spent time with us in R&Ds, pre-production show prep, and training days.

These Associate positions also de-risk us in some key areas: artistic burnout, and difficulties sourcing freelance workers for projects. We look forward to an annual programme of Associateships.



VOLUNTEERING DAYS

Core staff are granted Volunteering Days each year. In 2024-25, these were used to help out on School trips, and volunteer singing in Frozen Light's show Fire Songs.

MENTORING

In 2024-25, we offered 157 hours of free mentoring and shadowing to a wide range of artists and theatre workers. We welcomed observers into the Perfect Show rehearsal room, and undertook mentoring with people who work for Spare Tyre, Croydonites Festival, Piss Carnation, Blink Dance, Access All Areas and Lyric Hammersmith, as well as dozens of freelance theatre makers and students. Staff are also offered a paid hour a month to be mentored themselves.

Finally, we launched our innovative Introduction to Trusteeship programme, where deaf and disabled people interested in learning more about becoming a Trustee are paid for their time to observe Board meetings. You can read about the experience of Alison France, one of our Board Observers, [here](#).

SUSTAINABILITY

ZOOCO

We achieved a substantial sustainability goal in 24-25 when we switched banking providers. None of Zoo Co's money is now held with banks that invest in fossil fuels, arms, tobacco, or gambling. This is a hugely impactful action, and one of the most important things that a small organisation can do to reduce carbon emissions.

SET REUSE & CIRCULARITY

We've also been actively engaging in reusing items, and the circular economy. In Jan 2024, we took inventory of our set and props in storage, and decided on what could go.

We donated items to:

- Other theatre companies like Company Three, to use in their shows
- Local schools (gardening equipment for forest school sessions, stationery, arts and crafts)
- Local people via giveaway sites like Olio as well as charity shops
- Some items were sold, generating a small amount of income.

We developed an agreement with our home venue Stanley Arts to use a basement room for temporary storage of set items; this allows a 'little and often' approach, where items can be stored temporarily as they're processed. We sift through these items and gradually donate or sell them, rather than having to skip them all of a sudden. Having nearby, accessible space in which to store items has been crucial to our changed mindset in this area.

We're also keen to keep our carbon footprint low on tour; Perfect Show for Rachel's set was a pre-existing build brought out of storage. A few paint touch ups were needed after an encounter with a hornet's nest (maybe adding to the green credentials of the show..?) but being able to store and reuse set for remounting the show is another win for sustainability.

WEBSITE AND DIGITAL

After taking Carbon Literacy Training, our Project Administrator Alannagh Cooke made a commitment to make carbon reducing improvements to our website. As an arts organisation with an image-heavy web presence, it's inevitable that we will have a higher carbon footprint than a simple text-based site; but Al worked hard to improve website structure and metadata, and to take some weight out of pages to improve efficiency.

Chosen for ACE Environmental Report

ACE and Julie's Bicycle chose our Access Library for a case study in their Annual Reports. Read the full report [here](#), and see an extract below.



Zoo Co Creative

Community access equipment library for resource sharing

As part of Croydon's year as London Borough of Culture, Zoo Co Creative established a library of access equipment that could be loaned out free of charge to make events more accessible without having to purchase whole sets of new equipment. The Access Library was a great success, with sets of items being loaned out 35 times, benefiting a large number of event attendees as well as providing a unifying moment between disability rights and the climate emergency. Partnerships with Croydon cultural organisations were strengthened through this project, and Zoo Co Creative provided free consultancy services to further accessibility initiatives.

The Access Library also led to further sustainable practices within Zoo Co Creative by using the storage space to process their items more sustainably and sharing unused production items with the community.



Thank You!



Supported using public funding by
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ENGLAND**



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