step by step guides to living with disabilities

Inspiring, practical step by step guidance from people living with disabilities
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Hello and welcome to the first edition of our new step by step guides to living with disabilities.

This e-book series is being created following our realisation that the most inspiring and practical way to communicate advice and information is through the voices and stories of the people whose lives have been touched by disability.

Each edition will contain a new chapter covering a broad range of topics including independent living, assistive technology, supported living, enablement and many more that we hope you will find useful and informative. The voices and experiences that you read in the chapters have been compiled by our staff from a series of face to face interviews and telephone conversations.

About Henshaws

Henshaws is a specialist charity providing expert support, advice and training to anyone affected by sight loss. We also work with people with a range of learning difficulties, disabilities and complex needs, and because sight loss and disability affects family, friends and colleagues, we work with them too.

At Henshaws we believe that living with a disability shouldn’t mean that you have less right to an independent, happy and fulfilling life and future. Through our knowledgeable and caring staff, we provide support and training for people of all ages with a range of disabilities to enable and empower them to reach their full potential.

As a charity we rely on the generous support from voluntary donations to support people affected by visual impairment and other disabilities, so we would be grateful for any donation you could give so we can continue to provide our life-changing services.
step by step guides to living with disabilities

Chapter 1

Supporting your child to maintain skills for independent living
Story by Kate Simpson, mum to Tess
Young people with disabilities come to specialist colleges like Henshaws to learn skills to help them live more independent lives. Through flexible learning programmes, students are supported to develop their independence, employability, personal and social skills. Colleges provide expert staff and tailored facilities to create the ideal conditions for learning. But what happens when young people return home during evenings, weekends or holidays? And how can parents and carers ensure that the new skills their children have learnt are carried forward into their future?

In this e-book we hear from Kate Simpson, mum to Tess, about her top tips for supporting your child to maintain skills for independent living.

It is very difficult not to feel overprotective of your own son or daughter. However when they have disabilities, it can be even harder.

My name is Kate and I have a daughter Tess, 20, who is in her second year at Henshaws College in Harrogate. Tess has autism which affects her behaviour and means her verbal communication is limited. A benign tumour in her brain causes a visual impairment. We live in Leeds so Tess travels in each day by bus.

Since starting at College in September 2013, I have seen a huge improvement in Tess’s ability to be more independent. I am convinced that a key part of this success is because we have worked closely with staff to ensure that all the great progress which she achieves in College is not lost when she is at home.

Within this e-book I want to share my top 10 tips for supporting independent living.
When Tess reached sixth form, we realised that she didn’t have access to the activities and facilities she needed to learn, and she started to become bored. She began a placement one day a week at College. She was thrilled with it, and especially enjoyed her gardening and pottery sessions. It was different to other placements she went to, where they learnt to lay tables or fold napkins – activities which were meaningless for Tess. Whenever she came back from a day at College she was just different. She had a little sparkle. My advice to parents considering a specialist further education place for your child is to go with your gut instinct. It was the way that students are valued at Henshaws which struck me instantly. I could see that everyone was equal and treated as an individual. Students were learning through activities which motivated them because they were enjoyable, but they were also being challenged to achieve.
One of the greatest things that has come out of College for Tess is her increased independence in daily life. Her learning programme focuses on everyday skills like cooking, cleaning and shopping which we reinforce at home. To see her making her own cheese on toast in our kitchen is just brilliant. It takes her ages and the butter doesn’t go right to the edges but none of that matters as it’s something she can do by herself, for herself. If she spills something at home, she will mop it up herself.

She also empties the dishwasher and she’ll get the dustpan and brush out to clean up. Sometimes she does put dirty cups in the cupboard, or she will not quite dry things properly but she is building on and practising her skills every day. Her confidence has grown phenomenally through doing this.

I feel really strongly that if your child is learning skills at college then there is no point in them coming home only for their parents to do everything for them. Eventually we hope that Tess will be able to move into Supported Living so it’s our responsibility to keep her skills up as it’s in her best interests for the future.
There’s nothing wrong with setting a time to practise specific activities. Try to stand back and encourage your child to follow through with the task. For example, Tess always has cheese on toast for her lunch on Saturdays which she is now able to make herself. It’s a Saturday afternoon so it doesn’t matter to me how long it takes! If you know they have learnt a new skill that day at college, then practise it at home soon afterwards to help maintain it.

Learning a new skill for independence can be a long process and you may instinctively want to step in and help. However, even if progress is slow it’s really important to give your child space to build on their new skills. Don’t force them to take part in an activity which they are not engaging in. Sometimes I will put out all the equipment or ingredients and leave Tess to it. She might walk around the kitchen twenty times before she settles down to the activity but usually she will eventually get started.
If you can spend time at your child’s school or college it gives you a chance to see what they are learning and how staff are supporting them. I’ve been in to a few sessions with Tess and there’s nothing nicer than seeing her in her element in her world.

Try to maintain continual and clear communication with school or college. Use a communication book to record what your child has done at the weekend or during evenings, and log any new skills or behaviours. Staff at school or college can then add to this to feedback on progress and suggest skills for your child to practise at home. Tess can’t always tell me what she’s done but her communication book ensures that I keep up to date.
Assistive technology from iPads to ACCESS: YouTube can be a great tool for learning and practising new skills. Technology has given Tessa a totally new lease of life. Watching her navigate her way from one thing to another is tremendous. It means I can be in the kitchen getting dinner ready and she can sit at the table and use the computer so she’s in the room and feels part of family life.
The skills we teach as part of the independence curriculum are transferable into students’ daily lives. We work on developing everyday skills such as cooking, shopping and cleaning. Our aim is to really push and challenge our students to enable them to reach their full potential. We also like to work closely with parents to ensure these skills aren’t lost when students go home – for example by sharing their achievements and providing a step by step breakdown of how students can cook a certain recipe so they can continue practising at home. Working with parents and supporting staff is key to ensuring a successful transition and preparing our students for life after College.

Nicola Davis, Independence Programme Leader, Henshaws College

Help to manage behaviour

Make it clear to staff that if something has happened, you need to know about it that day so you can deal with it as soon as possible. For example, Tess has a particular behavioural OCD which can lead to her collecting pens from offices or removing stickers from equipment. College have developed a behavioural support plan to help manage this behaviour. For this to work we keep up clear communication between home and college so I can support the plan. I’m very clear with Tess that her behaviour has consequences so she knows that if it happens we won’t go shopping on Saturday, which is one of her favourite activities. She needs to understand that behaviours at College have consequences at home too so this helps to keep things consistent.
College is a very safe and social environment but the transition to home can sometimes lead to a loss in confidence or isolation. It’s important to make the most of communication tools to make sure your child can make themselves understood as much as possible both within the family and when you’re out and about. Tess’s speech has improved immensely during her time at College so she will now use language with extended family members to ask for a drink or explain what she wants to do. We continue to encourage her to do this and to develop her skills through regular trips out and speaking to different people.

Progress can be very slow and is not necessarily measurable on paper so it’s important to celebrate the small achievements which can make a big difference to everyday life. Sometimes when you are living with someone and seeing them day to day you don’t always realise how small changes are making an impact. I always ask myself, is Tess happy in her skin? Is she communicating with people? Is she confident in what she is doing? All of these things are cause for celebration so make sure you take time to notice them.
Chapter 2

How mobility and travel training can enhance people’s lives

Independent travel tips from Nic Millar (Disability Support Services) and Frank Ward (Henshaws Housing)
This eBook gives a brief introduction to how Henshaws Mobility and Travel Training can lead to greater independence and positive life experience.

The Disability Support Service enables people of all ages living with sight loss and a range of other disabilities to make informed choices about their future. We are here throughout their journey offering expert support, guidance and skills, helping people to fulfil their potential. Our experienced team of therapists and visual impairment specialists support people to develop their mobility, independent living and communication skills. We work with people of all ages with a range of disabilities in both educational and community settings. We also provide practical training courses including disability awareness for businesses and professionals.

Sam’s story

“My name is Sam Taylor, and I live in Henshaws Housing and Support. I have been increasing my mobility and travel through specialist training. I can now travel independently; beginning with local places and recently by aeroplane to Cyprus and back!”

Within this e-book we’d like to share basic principles we always consider when undertaking training, including when we helped Sam achieve her mobility goal. You too can apply there when helping someone to travel, or supporting an individual to become a safe, confident traveller.
Accurate assessment is essential, and should always be person centred, tailored and considerate to individuals needs, capabilities and aspirations. Completing a detailed, often multi disciplinary type assessment will help identify with the person what they want to achieve, are most confident in and what training and support they need to get there.
Building confidence and self-achievement are central to what the disability support service does. We work with the person to create resources to help them learn and achieve skills. For example, writing things down, videoing or sequencing a route using photographs on an iPad, could help them learn a route to the local shops using a long cane. Once a person has successfully achieved their goal, they need encouragement and opportunity to practise and maintain the skill. Working alongside mobility staff will ensure you are informed of what the person can do for themselves, what parts they may need help with and how this help should be given. Initially some people may need guiding whilst they become familiar with a new environment. You should always check the person’s well-being before they go out, if they are distracted, tired or unwell, they will find it hard to keep safe.

Sam’s experience

Booking assistance over the phone and at the airport customer service desk or by instructing the taxi driver on her preferred side to be guided, helped Sam maintain her communication skills. Using a Dictaphone to record a checklist to complete before each flight helped organise herself. Liaising with Sam’s support staff ensured they were informed of progress and any specific areas Sam needed help with.
planning and preparing for your journey

Consider simple things that may affect the journey. These can include time of day you are travelling, aids or equipment that may help such as a Dictaphone or a long cane, type of ticket to purchase and how and where it can be bought from. What assistance is needed and how to get it? e.g. sighted guide from station staff. Some travellers will need help choosing suitable clothing for the journey, taking into account changes to the weather, or help to re-cap safe travel skills before setting off.

Sam’s experience

Sam feels more alert and able to concentrate earlier in the day, so we carried out our training then. She struggles with memory so used her Braille skills and a Dictaphone to record and write up key information such as contact numbers, what to take with her each time she travelled, to refer back to later. She also benefitted from visiting the airport before she flew to familiarise herself with the sounds, smells etc.
Many people we support have learning disabilities, and may have difficulties with communication and language, and may take longer to process information. Added sight impairment could increase these difficulties. It is essential to adapt your style to suit the individual. Use clear, simple language, avoiding jargon, but try not to be patronising. Observing body language and facial expressions may help you to understand what the person is trying to communicate. Use your own gestures and facial expressions to aid communication. Some people may find it easier to use real objects or objects of reference to aid their communication. Photos or pictures can also help if objects aren’t available. Try to find a good location to communicate – somewhere quiet without distractions. Remember – all communication is meaningful; but you may need to adapt your own communication style.

Due to Sam’s total sight loss, she relies on tone of voice and choice of language to interpret meaning and emotion. We used role plays to simulate different scenarios she may encounter on her journey, from booking the taxi to locating her seat on the plane. Using positive and negative situations in a controlled role play environment helped promote problem solving whilst helping Sam recognise what questions and responses to give in different situations.
The length of time it takes to achieve a goal will vary from person to person, and this is why all of our training is tailored to the needs of the individual. Safe independent travel should not be rushed but managed at the pace of the person. The consistency of approach by everyone involved is essential – the working together that we have mentioned previously is most important. Time can also relate to speed of travel so when guiding a person, remember that travelling too fast is likely to make the person feel nervous or unsafe. Always check if the speed is comfortable and go at their preferred pace.

Sam doesn’t like to be rushed as this can cause her to fluster or become anxious. Spending the first 10 minutes of each session recapping skills covered last week, and agreeing what we would be doing in this session, helped Sam feel more positive and confident to attempt the task at hand. Role playing good/bad sighted guiding also gave Sam the confidence to ask her guide to slow down or speed up.
There are many new aids to assist independent mobility from hand held electronic echo devices to mobile phone apps that help navigate across towns and cities. We help individuals to trial and assess the suitability of different aids and evaluate which will best suit their needs.

**Sam’s experience**

Sam is a keen user of technology, and used speech output to access the internet to obtain information on flight times etc. She also used Skype to keep in touch with family and update them on progress of her training.
Taking risks is essential when developing confidence and the ability to problem solve and deal with unexpected situations such as cancelled flights or losing belongings. These risks need to be identified and safeguards put in place to minimise or remove the risk. All of our training includes dealing with new situations and learning ways to identify solutions to problems that may arise. It’s another simple way to promote independence and discourage over dependence.

Visiting the airport beforehand and talking to customer service staff gave Sam the opportunity to ask the airport staff the “what if” questions, putting her mind at rest. Role playing different but potential scenarios including stranger danger and staying safe in the airport and on the plane again helped Sam feel more confident and empowered to deal with any unexpected circumstances.

At Henshaws, we believe that, wherever they are, everyone has the right to an independent and fulfilling life. Our support, advice and training enables people and their families build skills, develop confidence, help each other and look forward to a more positive future.

Our affordable therapies, rehabilitation support and training can be delivered at our purpose-built facilities in Harrogate, in the home or at a workplace.

Working together for people with disabilities
Our reputation is built on delivering a quality and affordable specialist service, providing outstanding levels of care, guidance and support for people with a range of disabilities. We can work within a variety of funding models to meet your needs.

Our experienced team is always happy to talk about any service you might wish to purchase or develop.

Please contact us: 01423 886451  
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henshaws.org.uk
Shopping and cooking tips for children and young people with a visual impairment.

Presented by Alice Pennington and Natalie Thompson (Henshaws)
This e-book is aimed at supporting young people aged between 13 – 18 and their family and friends with a particular focus around kitchen skills such as shopping, preparing and cooking food and washing up safely and effectively.

These are the skills we teach on our ‘I Can Do It’ course (formerly IMCYP – Independence matters for Children & Young People) which is a three year project at Henshaws, funded by BBC Children in Need for children aged 8 - 12 and young people aged 13 - 18. The course covers social & emotional skills, keeping safe at home, outside and online, living independently with a VI, kitchen skills and a focus on transitions, goals and aspirations, businesses and professionals.

Alice’s story

“My name is Alice Pennington and I have been completely blind since I was eight weeks old due to being born with a condition which caused retinal detachment. I have a very small amount of light perception but can’t see anything else.”

I have secured a place at York St John University, to study English Language and Linguistics in order to pursue my dream of becoming a broadcast journalist.

To help me acquire more independence before leaving home, I recently completed the ‘I Can Do It’ course with Henshaws and I would like to share the top tips that I took away from the course with you. The tips I’ve chosen to focus on are around kitchen skills which are vital for living independently.
It is helpful to initially shop for food with a parent/carer/friend or another sighted adult who can help you to gain an understanding of the shop/supermarket and where items are located.

Touch and talk about all the different products: don’t hesitate to squeeze a squeezable product and explore all the details of texture, shape, temperature, and size.

It’s okay to ask a shop assistant for help; in many major supermarkets you can have your own personal shopper to assist if you ask.

If you are able to use assistive technology, online shopping is a great way to purchase shopping items and have them delivered to your door (there is usually a small charge for this which can be kept down by ordering shopping during weekdays).
• Explore a cold hob so that you can understand the layout and how it works.

• Avoid using the front rings of a hob if possible.

• Have a method to locate pan handles – these should always be over the work surface rather than the hob, the cook should be able to accurately locate a starting point near the surface edge and trail (fingers curled downwards) towards wall to find pan handle safely. Pans need to be placed and located in the same way every time.

• Practice locating pans and placing pans on the centre of rings, do this with both empty and weighted pans (use anything nearby that is cool and dry). Before starting to heat, decide where the pan will be placed when it is removed and practice this.

• Practice switching heat on and off and controlling temperature.

• A pair of tongs with a large gripping area is helpful for removing items from a frying pan or saucepan if tipping out the contents is not appropriate.

• Using a vegetable basket when boiling veg, eggs or pasta means no draining is needed and the remaining water can be dealt with when it has cooled.

• A boil alert can be used to attract attention when water is boiling (remove with veg basket).
• Use a large, heavyweight pan when frying, this is less likely to tip and splash oil.

• Frying bacon can be done by counting or timing each side according to taste; from the time it makes a noise in the pan.

• An egg ring can be useful when frying an egg, the serving slice can be slid underneath both egg and ring and transferred to a plate, the egg is then less likely to slide off before it gets to the plate.

• Test the temperature of oil for frying by adding a drop of water or piece of bread. The sound of this sizziling will indicate readiness. Using an oil spray or oil drizzler may be an easier way of getting a suitable amount of oil into a pan, it can glug too quickly out of a bottle.
When grilling sausages (and other items) a (damp, wooden) skewer down the centre makes them much easier to turn over. Otherwise a griddle frame makes turning much more efficient.

Practice removing the grill pan evenly and with control, (without heat). Decide where it should go, ensure the area is clear and this is practiced using oven gloves if needed (do not use a tea towel).

Practice turning cold food first if turning needs to be done and work out the best way of doing this.

Using a product like a George Forman Grill eliminates the need to turn food when grilling and cooked food can easily be pushed downwards on to a plate.
Using the Oven

- Start with a cold practice using oven gloves and remove and replace trays. Practise with dishes that will be used during the session and do this both empty and full (use weights and water as appropriate).

- Oven guards are available to buy on the high street (i.e. Aldi, Lakelands) which slot onto the edge of the rack in the oven, enabling the cook to pull out the rack safely.

- Using dishes that are larger than they need to be will make them easier to locate.

- Remember the cook needs somewhere nearby to place the tray without walking round the open oven door.

- Always check out the arrangement of shelves in the oven before switching on and move them if needed.

- Talking microwaves are available but the old-fashioned microwaves with click or groove dials can be operated successfully by visually impaired people, and you can always use bump-ons to show where the dial is facing. Sensitive touch pads with no differentiation between numbers are frustrating to try and use.
• Ask someone to teach you the correct table placement and learn to set the table using left and right side orientation skills. The knife goes on right side of plate. The fork goes on the left side, cup goes in front of the knife, chair goes behind the plate etc.

• Establish clues to appropriate distance from food. Head should not be above the table over food, it should be upright and hands moved from plate to mouth.

• When a plateful of food is presented without identification, you should politely ask another person to explain location of food on plate. At home, with family, this routine is accepted practice however family will occasionally forget to provide the information so you will learn to ask. Then in restaurants and other homes, you will do this naturally without embarrassment.
Washing up

Allow time and plenty of help to learn washing up with a family member or friend, you can first learn to dry and put pots away. Once you are used to this you can do the washing, initially asking a sighted person to check that the dishes are clean until you are used to it.

- Make sure the sink is clean prior to filling it with hot water.
- Fill the sink with hand-hot water, with the water level no higher than one hand’s length from the top of the sink.
- Wash glasses first and finish with pans containing cooking residue, grease, or other hard-to-remove materials.
- Use a washing up brush to wash sharp items.
- Use your hand to locate a free/open space prior to placing dishes in the rack.
- Make sure the sink is free of objects or debris after washing the dishes.
Chapter 4

Conquering Digital Accessibility for Disabled People

Top tips
This chapter offers advice on finding and using digital devices which can support disabled people within their working and day-to-day lives.

Technology is constantly evolving, and offers people living with sight loss and a range of other disabilities greater independence, as well as the opportunity to do everyday tasks that may have been more difficult or even impossible to do otherwise. Digital accessibility can be used to support daily life through online shopping, banking, and chatting to friends and families, and it can even provide new opportunities for work and communication. In this chapter, we’ll break down some of the ways to find and access new technology which can sometimes feel daunting.

Tom’s story

“I’m Tom, and I volunteer with the marketing and fundraising teams at Henshaws in their Manchester hub. I am partially sighted and have an eye condition called Retina Pigmentosa, which affects my eye sight and mobility within dark and low light conditions.

I have learned to adapt to this condition; I have undertaken mobility training and I am able to use a long cane. I have used a number of assistive aids within both my work and personal life which I have fund extremely beneficial. For example, assistive aids have helped me to complete a Legal Secretarial Diploma with Pittman Training, and within my recent role at Manchester University.

With this e-book, I’ll share some of my tips and experience for finding and using accessible technology.”
Find the device that works for you

Different providers for phones, tablets and computers and e-readers all have their own pros and cons for use. Each company has its own voice accessibility program - with Apple’s ‘Siri’, Window’s ‘Cortana’, Android’s ‘Google Now’ and Amazon’s ‘Echo’ being the most frequently used programs.

People have preferences for different types – it really does depend on your sight loss, disability, or what you’d be using it for! For example, if you have some sight, you may prefer to use an iPad as its larger screen makes it easier to use, but if you have very limited or no sight it may be better to get an iPhone, which has many of the same capabilities but is more portable.

Tom’s tips:

“Over the last decade there have been substantial developments in technology, with advances in laptops, smartphones, tablets and e-reading devices. All of these devices include a range of accessibility options, enabling blind or visually impaired people to interact with the device.

Apple is one of the leading developers of new technology, and I personally use the MacBook as I find these work best for me. Whilst in my recent role within the Faculty of Life Sciences e-learning team at Manchester University, I also used ZoomText and Jaws (PC screen magnification and reader software), CCTV (a magnifier for text size within documents), and a Pen Friend (a talking label device). I found that these devices in particular work well for me and helped me to complete my tasks at work.”
With an abundance of new technology coming in every year, it can be hard to sift through them all to find what would be the best fit for you. Plus, as a lot of technology can be expensive - with one of the most popular products Jaws Screen Reader costing over £600 - it’s best to try before you buy!

You can test technology for yourself at one of our hubs in Liverpool, Newcastle and Manchester. Our team can support you to test certain technology to find if it works for you, including trialling upcoming technology such as OrCam – a new piece of technology that fits onto glasses and converts text to speech. **Contact our team at 0161 876 1234 to find out what devices you can try out at one of our hubs.**
Tom’s tips:
“Whilst using my devices, I have a few accessibility options that I know work for me.

Voice Over acts as a screen reader and reads out information displayed on the screen via a synthesised voice. It’s easy to personalise, and even the pitch, tone and rate at which the voice reads out the information can be adjusted to suit the user’s requirement.

I also use Zoom – which enables you to either increase or decrease the size of information displayed on the screen. I change the brightness and colour contrast settings to adjust to my needs, and invert the colour scheme so the text is white against a black background. You can easily find what colour settings work for you.”

Most devices will have their own accessibility options built in, so before you buy additional software to use with your device, try the different settings with contrast, zoom, voiceovers, etc. as you may find your device has everything you need before you buy any add-ons. You might even be able to use free platforms within your device to help improve digital accessibility, for example our ‘ACCESS: Technology’ simplifies popular websites like YouTube and Facebook to make them easier to use.
New and promising technologies are developing all the time in the digital word, such as the upcoming braille tablet from BLITAB or new navigation devices such as Toyota’s Project BLAID. Joining groups online or in person, or subscribing to technology newsletters, can help to keep you up-to-date with all the latest news, tech and provide you with recommendations from people who are really using them.

**Henshaws Tech Talk group** now meets on the last Wednesday of every month in Manchester and the second Tuesday of every month in Liverpool to discuss all the new advancements in assistive technologies. People of all abilities are more than welcome, and you can even participate remotely. For more information in getting involved, please contact the Manchester team at 0161 872 1234.
Find a pace and environment that works for you to learn new technologies – some people prefer a group environment, others may prefer a one-to-one training session, or some may even just want to experiment on their own. Our I.T. team recommend that you go at your own pace, use repetition, and don’t get disheartened if something goes wrong.

And remember - although technology has come a long way in recent years, it is still by no means perfect! It can be frustrating that there are still limitations or glitches in certain technology but there will almost always be a way of working around it.
Check with places if they have accessible options

Technology doesn’t just have to be in the home. Digital accessibility can provide new opportunities in the outside world, including audio descriptions and upcoming projects such as the talking buses campaign. It may not always be obvious if a place offers accessible options so make sure to ask, as Tom did at his football team’s grounds:

Tom’s tips:

“In my spare time I enjoy watching sports including football and cricket. I’m a keen supporter of Sunderland AFC and try to attend as many home matches as possible. At the start of the 2013/14 season I became aware of an audio description service provided by the club which I find extremely helpful. Although it can be difficult to hear over the crowd noise, I think it is a very beneficial service and presume it is available at other football grounds. I also enjoy going to the cinema and watching films of all genres. I’ve used the audio description service at the Odeon and at HOME, which is available at selected screenings and should be available if you ask at the box office. Audio description involves a headset and describes the actions on screen via a narrative voice, which I find enhances my enjoyment of the screening. My only potential drawback is the audio quality might decrease depending on where you sit – and it’s not always available for every showing.”
Tom’s tips:

“Whilst volunteering for Henshaws, I helped to test the functionality and accessibility of their new website before it launched. I was able to identify what worked with my assistive devices and anywhere that needed improving.”

At Henshaws, we believe that everyone of all ages has the right to an independent and fulfilling life. At our Community hubs in Liverpool, Newcastle and Manchester, we offer free groups and courses for I.T., iPads, and iPhones training. If you’d like to get involved or find out what we could offer you, contact our friendly team at: 0161 872 1234 or info@henshaws.org.uk.
Chapter 5

Art Making –
the positive impact of creative art projects

Tips and ideas from Shaeron Caton-Rose (Artist and Workshop Leader) and Maria Dawbarn (Henshaws Arts & Crafts Centre Manager)
This eBook aims to share the benefits of making art and how to support people with a range of disabilities to be creative.

Henshaws Arts & Crafts Centre in Knaresborough, North Yorkshire, welcomes over 150 Art Makers each week to take part in creative workshops. Led by working artists, these workshops include art studio, jewellery, pottery, paper, printmaking and textiles.

Our Centre brings people together in an atmosphere that never fails to inspire. Through our workshops, people living with physical and learning disabilities discover their talents, put them into practice and realise their full potential.

Our Art Makers range in age from 17 to 80, with a wide range of disabilities and additional support needs.

Art Maker Wesley’s experience.

“I like coming to Henshaws because I like art. I also like drawing my favourite characters by copying from the book. Coming here has made me more confident.”

Within this eBook we explain the benefits of encouraging people with disabilities to participate in making art and offer some practical advice for instructors (be they artists themselves or not) to enable everyone to be an Art Maker.
Enable communication

Making art is a way of communicating using non-verbal and non-written language. Art enables many people who may struggle to talk about their ideas and their feelings to express themselves. It is the process of making art (not the product) which helps us to have a ‘conversation’ with ourselves about what we are trying to say and what we really think.
Art offers a social experience, in which groups of people can sit in companionable silence and become absorbed in a creative process. The focus on art helps people to relax and start talking – the most profound discussions can often happen in this context.

The social context is also a great advantage to people with disabilities. We ensure that our Art Makers mix so they can work on both individual and group projects. If you ask most Art Makers what they enjoy about their visits to the Centre, the top answer will be meeting and making friends.

Wesley’s experience.

Wesley’s aims when he first started attending creative workshops at the Arts & Crafts Centre were to improve his social communication and to learn to express his feelings. Being with the other Art Makers has encouraged Wesley to be more sociable and he’s already seeing the benefits.
Focus on enjoyment and achievement

When people are supported to focus on the creative process they are often amazed at the product and this is a real cause for celebration. There is a sense of achievement and joy from having made something. The process of making art offers an opportunity to learn new skills and a challenge to try things which may have been perceived as impossible.

Our Art Makers often bring an enviable straightforward willingness to ‘have a go’ and a fresh approach to art practice. This immediacy to making art is both welcome and refreshing.

In Europe and America, some artworks made in this way are collectors’ items, sold for millions, classified as ‘outsider art’, ‘raw art’ or ‘art brut’. The UK has some catching up to do in terms of our acceptance and acknowledgment of raw art!

Wesley’s experience.

Very slowly, Wesley’s confidence has grown through the praise he’s received for the pieces he has made. In his initial sessions he had more support but we’ve gradually encouraged him to do things for himself so he can be more independent.
We believe that disability should not be a barrier to making art. The correct support and some simple adaptations are often all that is needed. Our experience shows that by experimenting and working together it is possible to find enjoyable and accessible ways for all Art Makers to take part in art projects.

- When painting, remember simple things like taping down the paper so that it doesn’t slip, informing the Art Maker where everything is and asking them where they would like equipment (water pot/brush/glue). Don’t forget to make sure they are physically comfortable.

- A person with a visual impairment may struggle to see subtle shades of colour, and to distinguish one colour from another. Working with strong shades of black and white, or colours with a tonal range as extreme as black and white (e.g. dark purple and bright yellow) can help overcome this. Tactile materials (e.g., clay, papier mache) can also supplement visual perception and create meaningful connections for people with a visual impairment.
**Practical tips**

- Processes that can be built up slowly often work well. Repetitive processes such as papier mache, mosaic, collage, drawing with felt tips, oil pastels, threading, cutting, and painting can all be incorporated into other projects depending on the individual level of skill and ability.

- Using stencils, making wire frames or armatures (sculptural frames onto which people can papier mache, weave or attach things to) can enable Art Makers to use a number of repetitive and simple processes to build an impressive final result. The design of the base structure can be agreed with the person you are working with and can often come from their original drawing/designs.

- Translating original drawings into other processes such as silkscreen printing or mosaic design allows a person’s individual voice to be respected and their creativity to be encapsulated in the final product.

**Art Maker Wesley’s experience.**

Wesley loves the “Despicable Me” films and was inspired to start drawing some of his favourite characters in his art studio sessions. With the support of workshop leaders, he transferred his designs into artwork including mosaics, coasters and ceramic characters.
Advice for supporting Art Makers

- Always focus on the process not the product. However, experienced, trained instructors should be able to enable product too. This does require an inventive mind!

- It may be necessary to simplify the process, by separating a project into a number of small tasks. Alternatively, work together on a group project where each individual is given an appropriate task to complete and which are brought together for a finished project.

- Some Art Makers like to work slowly and enjoy taking their time with the creative process and not rushing. Others like to work quickly. There is no right and wrong so take the lead from your Art Maker and how they prefer to work. Often one process leads to another or to a decision about what the end result might be.

- Suggest a theme and encourage your Art Makers to try different subject matters to those they might feel comfortable with. Challenge is good for all of us. It can be helpful to bring in images printed from the web (always clear and with contrasting colours and shapes), or real objects (like leaves, flowers, shells etc.) to draw from, or suggest themes to work from imagination. Some people choose to make their own designs on their own themes.

- When getting started or when a new Art Maker joins your group, ask what they would like to do. Start by getting them to paint or draw and just let them “go for it” in their first art session. This encourages them to relax, do their own thing and gives you the opportunity to see what they’re interested in, what their style is, and what support they may need.
“Recently we have been making a poetry book which is a result of a conversation we had in the art room about Burns Night. From Burns Night we moved onto Robert Burns and a project was born. I invited different people to be involved, and they suggested poems or I suggested poems to them which suited their work. One person likes drawing spiders so we found a poem about a spider. Another person likes painting landscapes so we chose William Wordsworth “I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud”. We had great fun making the prints and reading the poems out in the studio.”

Workshop Leader, Shaeron Caton-Rose

More stories from our Art Makers and additional information on the creative workshops we run for people with disabilities at our Arts & Crafts Centre in North Yorkshire is available from our website henshawsacc.org.uk

If you would like to arrange a visit please call us on 01423 541888 or email arts&crafts@henshaws.org.uk
Make a papier mache letter

You will need:

- Card (cereal box or packages)
- Newspaper
- Scissors
- Wallpaper paste or PVA glue
- A paintbrush
- A pencil
- Poster paint (white as well as the colours you choose for decoration)
- Clear varnish (water based)
- Glitter, wrapping paper, buttons, etc to decorate
1. Decide which letter you are going to make; it could be the initial of your name. Using the piece of card and pencil draw out your letter. The size of the letter is up to you. Cut out the letter using scissors.

2. Tear the newspaper into strips and then into pieces that are about 10 cm x 5 cm.

3. Mix the wallpaper paste according to the instructions or if you are using PVA glue add a little water to thin it down.

4. Using a brush or your hands coat the newspaper pieces with paste/glue and place onto the cardboard letter. Build up the newspaper layers and make sure the paper wraps around the edges of the letter.

5. The paper pieces can be overlapped, they don’t have to be in tidy strips! Both sides of the letter need to be covered. Continue to layer the paper until the letter is the size and thickness you want.

6. Leave it to dry. It may take up to a day, depending on how many layers you have put on!

7. Once dry, paint your letter with a layer of white paint to help prevent the print on the newspaper being visible. Leave it to dry again.

8. Decorate the letter with your chosen paint colours and design, use glitter, buttons or other materials to make it unique.

9. A layer of water-based clear varnish will help protect the paint and decorations on your finished letter. Alternatively you can use PVA glue as a varnish as it dries clear and glossy. Again leave the varnish or glue to dry thoroughly.

10. You can use your finished letter to decorate your room.
Chapter five marks the end of our Guide to Living with Disabilities eBook series.

Other chapters covered independence skills, mobility, kitchen skills and digital accessibility. Each chapter combines the expertise of Henshaws staff with the voices and stories of people whose lives are affected by disability. If you only have this chapter and are interested in the others then please get in touch or visit our website.

Have you visited our Knowledge Village yet? Explore our e-book and video library and learn about everything from products and technology to our useful Life Hacks.

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