Accessible and Inclusive Event Guide

ombudsman
do leanaí
for children

BEYOND
LIMITS

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1 The Ombudsman for Children's Office

Who we are

The Ombudsman for Children's Office (OCO) is a human rights institution that promotes the rights and welfare of young people under 18 years of age living in Ireland. The OCO also investigates complaints about services provided to children by public organisations. The service is free and independent.

Introduction

The Ombudsman for Children's Office hosted Beyond Limits, an event for children with disabilities, in 2019 and 2022. Beyond Limits is a family event made up of talks, entertainment and activities that include disabled children in the line-up and that they can take part in. Beyond Limits was designed to be fully accessible and inclusive. This means that all children should be able to attend and take part.

Over 2,000 people have attended Beyond Limits events. In 2019 Beyond Limits took place in Croke Park and in 2022 there were events in both Sligo and Limerick. In 2022 a Beyond Limits Youth Advisory Panel (YAP) was established to help plan and organise the events. The YAP was made up of eight amazing young people of all abilities from different parts of the country.

Beyond Limits is a special space where disabled children and their families do not feel different. They do not have to do the same preparation to attend, they do not need to worry about whether the supports they need will be available and they do not need to consider if children will disrupt what is going on.

In organising three Beyond Limits events we discovered that there is no centralised resource available (that we could find) to help organise a fully accessible and inclusive event. In order to make Beyond Limits happen we consulted with a range of organisations and we had the input of our YAP who experience barriers to participation and attendance every day.

Making an event accessible and inclusive should not be an added extra. This Accessible and Inclusive Event Guide has been created to bring together all of our learnings and to help other organisations and businesses to do better for disabled children and adults.

What is an accessible and inclusive event?[1]

Access means providing the opportunity for full participation free from barriers. Planning a successful event is planning for access. It is both anticipating the needs of attendees to the event so that it is accessible by all people to the greatest extent possible, without the need for individual modifications, and providing an effective means of responding to specific requests for accommodations, where needed. In making access a key tenet in event planning, you make a commitment to making your event inclusive and welcoming to all attendees.

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1   https://equalopportunityprograms.uchicago.edu/accessibility/event-guide/#:~:text=It%20is%20both%20anticipating%20the,re-quests%20for%20accommodations%2C%20where%20needed.

2 About this guide:

This guide is designed to act as a check list for companies, organisations and event planners. The objective is to make events accessible to as many people as possible. Little changes that make things easier for disabled people generally make things easier for everyone!

This guide details what you can do in advance and things to consider on the day of your event. There are costs associated with some of the measures suggested here but we have tried to keep the advice, practical and as easy to implement as possible.

3 Planning

Venue

These are questions that the events team should ask when selecting a venue.

Is the venue physically accessible?

- **Doors:** How wide are the doors? Is there a step or a ledge on the way in?

- **Lift:** Is the venue on one level? If there is a second floor is there a lift? If the lift is broken on the day is there a backup? How big is the lift – would it fit a larger chair?

- **Toilets:** Where are the toilets? How many accessible toilets are there? Is there a Changing Places[2] facility?

- **Seating:** Is the seating tiered or on the flat? If you choose to use tiered seating where will wheelchair users sit?

- **Aisles:** How wide are the aisles? Is there enough space to make wider isles?

- **Stage:** Is there a stage? Does the stage have a ramp? (see ramp guidelines)

- **Catering:** If you are serving food, is that area accessible?

- **Parking:** Is there adequate accessible parking? Do you have a drop off area for people who need to be left right at the door?

- **Public Transport:** Is your venue accessible by public transport?

Can you make your venue inclusive?

- Is there an area that you can allocate as a quiet space?

- Is there somewhere to set up a sensory area?

- Where will you put your signage?

- Are there enough entry and exit points if people want to leave or move around?

Staging and AV

These are the questions the event team should ask when contracting a company to provide staging and AV.

- Does the stage have a ramp?

- What height is the stage? Will it impact your ramp? Will everyone be able to see the speakers/performers if there is a smaller person or someone sitting on stage?

- Plan your ramp if you are building a stage or the venue does not already have a ramp (see ramp guidelines).

- Will you have a podium on the stage? What height will it be? Can everyone use it?

- Plan your lighting carefully. If you are planning to use flashing lights, this is something you will have to tell people about.

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2   Changing Places facilities are designed to enhance the health, safety, comfort and dignity of someone who may need extra support and additional equipment during personal care tasks. https://changingplaces.ie/#:~:text=Changing%20Places%20facili-ties%20are%20designed,and%20support%20features%20for%20assistants.

- Test the sound levels in the venue. Ensure everyone can hear but it shouldn't be too loud.

- Is there a screen where people can see more clearly what is going on?

- Will you have subtitles on the screen? Consider placing them on top of the screen so people in the back can read them? What colour and font are the subtitles? Are they easy to read?

- If you have an Irish Sign Language (ISL) interpreter where will they stand? The ISL interpreter should also be visible to those attending and on screen at all times if possible.

- Will the event be live streamed or recorded? If you are streaming your event people who are overwhelmed or experiencing sensory overload can leave the venue and watch elsewhere.

Content and Activities

These are the questions the event team should ask when deciding who to invite to take part and what activities to plan

Disabled people do not only talk about disability issues. They have expertise in many areas and should be considered for all events.

- Who are your speakers/performers/contributors/host? Have you included or considered disabled people within the sector?

- Is there someone who would fit well with your event but who needs extra support? E.g. a nonverbal contributor, someone who suffers from anxiety. Including them could make the event better with just a bit of extra planning. Someone they know and trust may be able to support them on the day.

- Does your event include activities? What supports are needed to ensure that everyone can take part?

Speakers/Performers/Participants

- Find out in advance what supports or facilities your speakers and performers will need.

- What kind of mics will they need?

- Do they need to sit?

- Do they need a podium/table?

- Do they need someone to assist them or be on stage with them?

- A rehearsal, run through or call in advance is extremely important for your speakers/performers/participant. Build this into your plan

Information in advance

Letting people know what they can expect and preparing them for the event is one of the simplest, and most important aspects of accessibility and inclusiveness. This should be normal, standard practice as it can benefit everyone. However, people with physical, sensory and intellectual disabilities really benefit from information in advance. In most cases this does not add to costs, it just take a little bit more planning.

Invitations - issue invitation in plenty of time.

- Provide information on the venue, parking and toilet facilities.
- Let people know if you will be providing Irish Sign Language and/or subtitles, or ask them to let you know if they need it.
- Include a contact person if they have questions. Tell people that you will be providing further information in advance.

Information Email - at least one week before the event send an information email. The information email should include:

- Information on the venue including the Eircode, if there will be Changing Places, a quiet space or sensory room
- Provide pictures if you can
- Parking information
- The agenda for the day including breaks

- If you will have subtitles or ISL
- A social story of what to expect
- A sensory map of the area – be clear if it will be loud or if there will be flashing lights
- Food that is available
- What they need to bring e.g. ear defenders, drinks etc
- What they will be doing – sitting, taking part
- A contact for any questions

Online information – if you are directing people to a website or an online resource ensure it includes all of you accessibility information. Any pictures shared on your website or on social should include alternative text.

Survey – if you want to know how many wheelchair users are attending or if people require additional supports, a survey can be a good idea. However, if you are setting out to create an accessible event a survey may not actually give you that much extra information. We found that the only thing you really need to know are the wheelchair users as you want to be able to make sure they can sit wherever they want and that you have enough people to help.

4 On the Day

Volunteers/Staff

- Your staff/volunteers are your most important asset on the day. Ensure that everyone who is working or helping out at the venue has received a proper briefing on the event, the facilities and the venue.

- They should know where everything is or they should know who to ask. They should be trained and prepared to deal with additional needs. Nobody attending your event should feel that they weren't listened to, that they were dismissed or that they were an inconvenience.

Signage

- Information and signage is key. Make sure there are plenty of signs for the toilets, the quiet space, and the exits.

- Display your timetable/schedule clearly. If you have information online, use QR codes around the venue.

Seating

- Assigned seating can be stressful for some attendees – if possible allow for free seating.

- If there is allocated seating, let people know in advance and include a seating plan in your information email.

- Wheelchair users should not be bunched together in a 'wheelchair area'. They should be able to choose the area

in the room where they want to sit. If the venue restricts where wheelchairs are accommodated,

- If the venue only allows for wheelchairs in one area e.g. on the flat, ensure that wheelchair users can sit with the rest of their party.

Movement breaks

- Everyone benefits from a movement break. Build these into your event to keep the audience engaged.

Speakers and performers

- Make sure your Stage Manager or sound tech is aware if your speakers or performers have sensory or other issues.

- Have a second person on hand when you are putting on mics.

Not everything will go right

- If someone is unhappy or does not feel that they have the supports that they need, listen to them and find out how you can do better.

- If there is something you can do immediately to solve the problem, work with your colleagues to do that.

- If you cannot fix the issue on the spot, tell the person straight up. Apologise and take note for your next event.

5 Online Events

For online events you do not need to consider the physical accessibility aspects but all of the other guidelines are relevant.

- Use live subtitles.
- Use Alt text for images and graphics.
- If possible record your event and make it available afterwards.
- Use chat functions to allow people to take part.

6 Outdoor Events

All of the other guidelines still apply. In addition consider if all people can access every element of the event.

- Be really clear with attendees on what they can expect – if bad weather will impact your plans and make the event less accessible, let them know.
- What is the surface like? Could a wheelchair user or someone using a walking aid easily get around? Do you need to consider adding flooring?

- Can you add a drop off point?
- Could you provide a wheelchair facility like at the airport?
- Could you help carry people's stuff?
- Can you colour code areas to make getting around easier?

7 Ramp Guidelines

- People using the ramp should be able to do so independently if they can.

- It should not be too steep.

- Ramps are not just for wheelchair users. Others who are not as mobile may find ramps easier to use than steps.

- The recommended gradient for a ramps is 1:20[3] and all ramps should include a handrail.

- It is also good if the ramp has a ledge on the sides so a wheel or foot cannot slip over the edge.

- When the ramp is there, use it. If possible everyone going on stage should use the ramp. Why differentiate? There is no need.
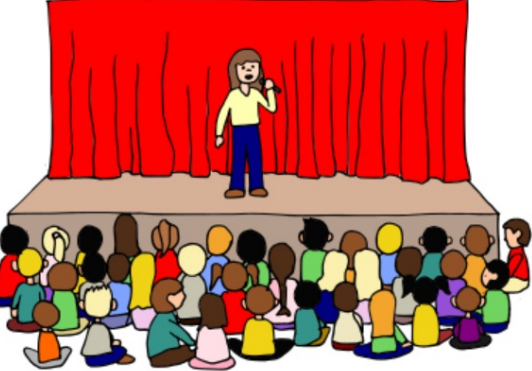
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3   https://www.iwa.ie/app/uploads/access-guidelines/best-practice-access-guidelines/3188_IWA_Best_Practice_Access_Guidelines_4.pdf

Sample Documents

What is a sensory guide?

BEYOND LIMITS

FLOOR PLAN

SPORTS TRACK

GG'S FOOD TRUCK

STAFF

STAFF

WC

WC

LIFT

QUIET SPACE

STAIRS

BREAKOUT ROOM

SIT DOWN AREA

UPSTAIRS SPACE

OCEAN FM

MEET & GREET

ENTRANCE

ACTIVITIES

1. CBS Roscommon
2. Little Kneaders – Sensory Play Area
3. Inclusion Ireland
4. Independent Living Movement Ireland
5. Para Table Tennis
6. Arts and Crafts
7. Gaming Station
8. Rhythm Room
9. Gary B Wheelchairs
10. Music Generation
11. Bluestack Foundation Choir
12. Family Carers Ireland

SEATING

ACCESSILOO

SENSORY SPACE

SILENT DISCO

GYMNASTICS DISPLAY

STAGE

SENSORY GUIDE

this area may be noisy

there may be some smells here

there may be lights

there may be crowds here

KNOCKNAREA ARENA, SATURDAY 1ST OCTOBER
DOORS OPEN AT 10AM

What is a social story[4]?

Recruitment for Beyond Limits Youth Advisory Panel Social Story

ombudsman do leanaí for children	**The Ombudsman for Children's Office or the OCO protects children's rights.**
BEYOND LIMITS 22 Empowering young people with disabilities	**The OCO holds an event called Beyond Limits.**
	Beyond Limits is an event for children with disabilities.
	This year we are having two events in October for children with disabilities and their families.

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4   "Social Stories are a social learning tool that supports the safe and meaningful exchange of information between parents, professionals, and people with autism of all ages." C. Gray, *What is a Social Story?* Carol Gray Social Stories, March 2022. https://carolgraysocialstories.com/social-stories/what-is-it/
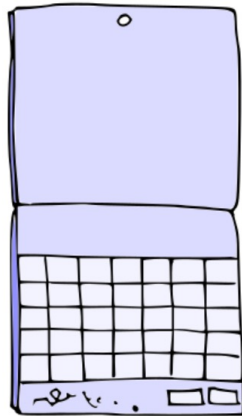
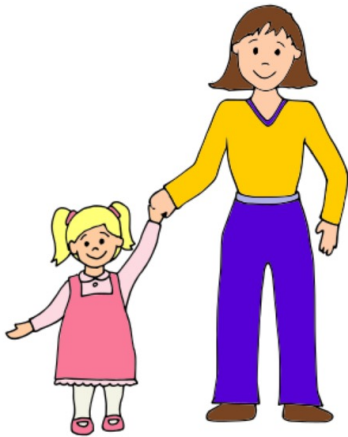|	It is really important that we know how children with disabilities would like these events to be run.
	That is why we are asking you to join our Beyond Limits Youth Advisory Panel or BLYAP. Do you want to join?
	If you want to join, you will come to one meeting each month.
	The meeting will be about 45 minutes long.

	The meeting will be on Zoom.
	Your mum or dad can help you.
	If you would like to join the Beyond Limits BLYAP then email communications@oco.ie

9 Checklist

Venue	Yes	No
Wide doors		
Enough entry/exit points to the room		
Step or ledge at entrance		
Accessible toilets		
Changing Places		
Flat seating		
Accessible stage		
Wide aisles		
Catering area accessible		
Enough accessible parking		
Drop off point		
Accessible by public transport		
Room/area for quiet space		
Room/area for sensory space		
Identify spots for signage		

Staging and AV	Yes	No
Ramp on stage		
Podium on stage		
Flashing lights		
Sound too loud		
Extra screen to see what's on stage		
Subtitles on screen		
ISL visible in the room and on screen		
Streaming event		
Recording event		

Ramp Guidelines	Yes	No
Recommended gradient of 1:20		
Handrail		
Ledge		
Ramp part of set/used by all		

Content and Activities	Yes	No
Disabled speakers or performers Considered		
Activities accessible for all		

Speakers/Performers/Participants	Yes	No
Ask presenters/performers if they need extra supports		
Clip mics or headsets		
Chairs/tables needed on stage		
Podium needed (consider podium height)		
Will there be an assistant with a speaker/performer?		

Information in advance	Yes	No
Invitation with info on venue, parking, toilet facilities (if you have changing places) and info on ISL		
Find out how many wheelchair users or people with limited mobility attending		
Email at least one week in advance with info on venue (eircode), parking, toilets, catering, sensory space, include pictures, the agenda, a social story, sensory map, what they need to bring, what they will be doing, contact info.		
Create a space online with all the required information		

On the Day	Yes	No
Recruit volunteers		
Detailed volunteer briefing		
Lots of accessible signage (use QR codes if necessary)		
Wheelchair users/limited mobility attendees should be able to choose where they sit (venue dependent)		
Include movement breaks		
Include alternative text in scripts i.e. describe what people may not see		
Include information on any changes to sound, lighting etc in script		

Online Events	Yes	No
Use live subtitles		
Use alt text for images, graphics and in scripts		
Record event and make available afterwards		
Use chat function for participation		

Outdoor Events	Yes	No
Set realistic expectations		
Consider surfaces, paths and flooring		
Are there drop off points		
Volunteers to help with set-up/carrying stuff		
Colour code areas to make it easier to get around		

Useful resources:

https://www.iwa.ie/app/uploads/access-guidelines/best-practice-access-guidelines/3188_IWA_Best_Practice_Access_Guidelines_4.pdf