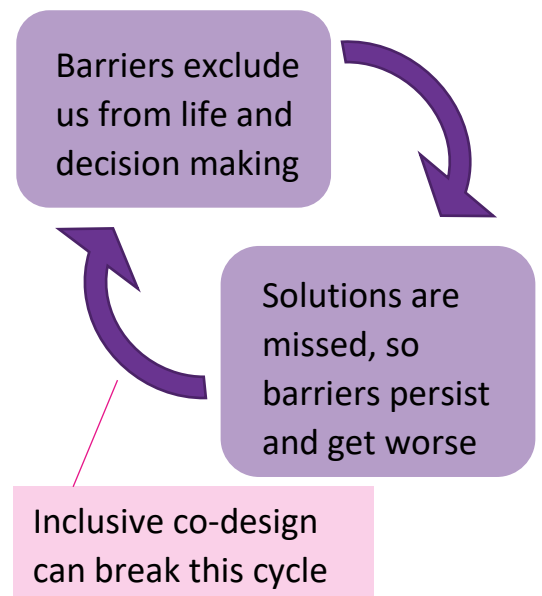


Inclusive Co-design: A how-to guide from Glasgow Disability Alliance

Disabled people face a cycle of exclusion: living in a world that was not designed with us in mind, we face barriers every day, in all areas of life. These same barriers stop us from getting involved and having our voices heard, so our lived experience expertise is missing from the process of designing solutions. Barriers persist and multiply each time designs and decisions are made without us. Inclusive co-design can help us break this cycle of exclusion, create services and solutions that leave no one behind – and build a more equal society in the long run.



GDA was set up by disabled people in 2001 to build the collective voice of disabled people, to be equal partners in shaping decisions and services that affect us. Our methods of inclusive, accessible capacity building and dialogue have been designed and developed by and with our diverse disabled members, and tried and tested over 20 years, through partnerships across all sectors and levels of decision making. Whether it's blueprints for street re-design or major refurbishments of museums and train stations, the Commonwealth Games Volunteering programme or Scotland's new Social Security system, National legislation or a local community plan: disabled people's insights are vital to ensure we design-out the barriers, so our projects, services and interventions leave no-one behind.

Involving disabled people: how-to checklist

Getting started

1. Ask us!

- ✓ Involve disabled people from the earliest planning stages.
- ✓ Ask disabled people what their involvement should look like – and what support they may need to participate.

2. Co-design the agenda:

- ✓ Having clear questions in mind for disabled people to answer is a great starting point – but be aware that the key issues from disabled people's point of view may differ from priorities you initially identify.
- ✓ Be flexible and open to developing a shared agenda, so you can encourage and learn from the lived experience expertise. The collaborative sense-making approach should start from the very first contact of engagement.
- ✓ Be open and honest about your purpose acknowledging power dynamics to build trust.
- ✓ Demonstrate listening and valuing disabled people's contributions.
- ✓ Create a sense of learning all round – emphasise that no one party has all the answers.

3. Reaching out: Disabled people led organisations (DPOs) should be your first port of call for advice about how best to engage and involve disabled participants, how to frame the issues in a way that is most relevant and accessible to disabled people, and how best to tap into the lived experience expertise you need. Barriers in society leave disabled people isolated - DPOs are a grassroots network connecting disabled people who have invaluable insights and contributions to share.

Reaching out:

National and Regional Disabled People led Organisations (DPOs)

DPOs are organisations which are **run by and for disabled people** with disabled people making up at least 51% of the Board.

Disability Equality Scotland working for access and inclusion nationally; information hubs on travel, hate crime, inclusive communication.

Deaf Scotland membership organisation for networks of Deaf Sign Language users, and people who are Deafblind, Deafened and Hard of Hearing.

British Deaf Association (BDA) advocacy, policy and capacity building for Deaf communities across the UK.

Inclusion Scotland National Policy and DPO umbrella organisation (see **directory**): runs Access to Elected Office fund and Internship programme for disabled people.

People First Scotland led by people with learning difficulties, local branches in Glasgow, Fife and South Lanarkshire

Self-Directed Support Scotland - Umbrella supporting **organisations** driving Independent Living and Self-Directed Support.

VOX (Voices of Experience) led by people with mental health conditions – **network** of local user-led groups.

Glasgow Disability Alliance community development organisation led by 5000+ disabled members – collective voice to influence change; accessible learning, coaching and peer support.

Glasgow Centre for Inclusive Living: provides training and support to boost choice and control, through access to SDS, peer support, accessible housing, employability.

Lothian Centre for Inclusive Living: supports independent living through SDS, information, training and peer support.

Local Access Panels work with planners to remove barriers in local environment: accesspanelnetwork.org.uk

Local or thematic community led / self-help organisations may exist in different areas. Try searching local authority social work pages, groups or networks on social media, or check <https://www.aliss.org/>

4 Inclusive Communication

Co-design your communications as much as possible: content, style and channels. As disabled people led organisations are often over-stretched and under-resourced, make your communications as accessible as you can to begin with, before seeking feedback from the intended audience.

Accessible information basics

- **Plain English** at all times. Avoid acronyms, abbreviations and jargon - if you must use them, explain them.
- **San serif** font, **Size 14** font minimum.
- **Bold for emphasis** (avoid all caps / italics / underlined).
- **Left alignment** at all times – avoid justifying.
- **High contrast, solid background** (avoid wording over images or busy backgrounds).
- Leave white space.
- **Use formatting** (headings, body text) to aid screen reader navigation.

To assist those with lower literacy, learning difficulties, or those learning English:

- **Use images which support the text.**
- **Avoid contractions** (such as can't, isn't): full words aid understanding.
- **Avoid using questions as headings** as these can make readers feel as if they are being tested: better to say “About Inclusive Design” than “What is Inclusive Design?”

Offer alternative formats: Braille, BSL, audio, plain text version emailed in advance.

Inclusive Communication Basics

- Ask what formats or support people may need for communication.
- Provide information in advance so people have time to prepare and take part fully.
- Verbally described and visuals used, to ensure those with visual impairments are included.
- Set aside budgets to provide BSL interpreters / palantypist note-takers if required.
- If online, use closed caption or subtitles functions.
- Make sure people can contact you via Contact Scotland-BSL video link.
- Plan meetings to give enough time for those with communication support needs to understand and participate
- Build in breaks – this is important for interpreters or palantypists as well as participants.

5. Let people know you are accessible!

- ✓ Tell us if your event, meeting or process is accessible, or we will assume it is not.
- ✓ Outline what access arrangements are available / in place (such as transport, personal assistance, digital support).
- ✓ Encourage people to get in touch if there are any other adjustments they may need.
- ✓ Be honest about what you are not able to provide - this will build trust.

6. Offer multiple ways to participate:

- ✓ If people cannot attend face to face, consider ways they can share their views and experiences with you by phone, email, or online chat.
- ✓ **Ask disabled people what methods have worked for them;** be flexible and offer choices to maximise participation and contributions
- ✓ **Outreach methods** should include post, phone, in-person, radio/ TV/ print media, as well as email and social media – to ensure you can reach those who face digital exclusion as well as online audiences.
- ✓ BSL and subtitled videos to promote the engagement will encourage Deaf people to participate and reassure them that their communication needs will be met.

Online Participation: Inclusion Checklist

Online sessions can open your process to more participants. However, many disabled people face digital exclusion, so online engagement is best used alongside other methods i.e. phone calls, face to face. This will help you access lived experience expertise from diverse backgrounds and skillsets as well.

Digital Inclusion: Many disabled people lack the technology, connectivity or confidence to access activities and information online. The right access and support can boost disabled people's digital inclusion, confidence and participation in the process.

- Can you support participants to access a device or connectivity (data top up, mifi?) if they need it to take part?
 - Check participants have enough data to join a video call. Someone who mostly browses webpages may think they have lots of data, not realising Zoom uses 3GB / hour – check in advance that taking part won't wipe out their allowance - or worse, cost them a lot of money.
 - Can you invest time and patience to coach those who lack confidence or experience to get online?
-
- ✓ Not everyone has an email address or understands the concept of email; can you support them to set one up so they can receive a zoom link?
 - ✓ Encourage prospective digital learner to have a go and persevere - reassure them that you won't give up on them just because they need a bit longer.
 - ✓ Many things that might seem natural to digitally experienced people can be foreign and overwhelming for a new learner. Be ready to explain common terms like 'browser', 'data', 'wifi' and 'link'
 - ✓ Be ready to explain actions like 'swipe', 'short press' versus 'long press'. Some people may find these easier with a stylus, or may need support to change the settings and sensitivity.
 - ✓ Make no assumptions about someone's literacy skills. Describe what an app or icon look like to help them identify and navigate the screen – or ask them to describe what they see.
 - ✓ If someone is struggling to find the 'unmute' button, make use of the 'ask to unmute' function – this brings up a prompt in the middle of the person's screen and they can just press 'agree'.
 - ✓ Some people may need a reminder call or text, or quick refresher on how to access the link to the session.

- ✓ Reach out by phone or SMS if they do not appear, to offer support with any last minute difficulties connecting.
- ✓ Preparing someone for their first videocall, explain that participants will be able to see and hear them, their surroundings, and anyone else in the room, so to be aware of privacy and confidentiality concerns. Suggest headphones or earphones if this is helpful.
- ✓ Some participants may need physical support from someone in their household e.g. to get set up, to mute / unmute. Explore this with them and ensure the pacing and participation allows time for this.

Chat function: can be an enabler for people to share their views – especially for people who are unable to contribute vocally. It can also be distracting if over-used, especially for those using Screenreaders and some autistic people. Agree guidelines around the chat function to accommodate who is attending - remind people to use it sparingly or only if necessary. In larger events, there may be points when it is appropriate to disable the chat function, such as during a speaker or a specific task.

Access: Accessibility functions vary with different platforms - Keep up to date on changes with video conferencing apps as functionality and accessibility change frequently. Zoom and MS Teams each have their advantages – while, at the time of writing, Webex is incompatible with screen readers. Above all, ask disabled people what they prefer or find more accessible.

Ask about access needs, to help establish the most appropriate platform and accessibility features that will be needed. Check whether note-takers or interpreters are required, and ensure that whoever you book is familiar with the platform you will be using.

Flexibility: Are you flexible in how people can participate e.g. leaving camera switched off, using chat functions rather than speaking. Can people dial in, take part by email or on the phone?

More info: Disability Equality Scotland's [Webinar](#) on running inclusive online sessions.

In-person Participation: Inclusion Checklist

Venues / Meeting Space

Visit in advance and/or ask for an access audit/ access statement: share this info with participants in advance.

Lifts required, if rooms are not on ground floor. Are all lifts working well, and spacious enough for a wheelchair user and companion?

Is there plenty of turning space outside the lift doors on each floor?

Toilets: is there at least one accessible toilet – is it spacious, clean and well-stocked? Are toilets all on one level, close to the room being used? Fewer toilets will require longer breaks. Check whether a hoist or [Changing Places](#) facility is needed – these can be [hired in](#).

Space: Think about:

- Level access throughout.
- Distance from car park / entrance to meeting space: let people know.
- Variety of seating: with / without arms, cushioned / supportive for those with chronic pain.
- Are there tables for people to use? Is there plenty of space between tables for wheelchair users to pass each other freely? Are there rest areas with seating, and quiet spaces?

Lighting and sound

- Can lighting be adjusted for different visually impaired people's needs? Is there good contrast for people moving around the space?
- Is there a loop system – can you hire one if needed? Is there a roving mic for speakers, and to assist discussions in a large group?

Timings

- Avoid starting meetings too early in the morning – this can be a barrier for many reasons e.g. social care support, impairment or condition.
- Build in breaks to your session or event, factor in extra time for people who need assistance to use facilities / get refreshments.
- Will there be plenty of time and support available to participants for understanding and having their say?

“Meetings need to go at a pace that we can follow.”

Transport

Many disabled people will only be able to attend if taxis are provided:

- Ask what kind of taxi they require: 'Black Cab', TX1, private hire, step or ramp access?
- Cover costs of taxis, mileage or public transport: Reimburse on the day or pay taxis directly if you can.
- Ensure there is accessible parking and space for dropping off at the venue.
- Check if participants need to be met on arrival.

Support/Personal Assistance is a vital part of making events accessible. Ask people what their support needs are and think about how you will meet them. Extra staff, or Personal Assistants (PAs) may be needed to help people with:

- Getting in & out of transport.
- Navigating in and around the venue.
- Finding a suitable seat or place at the event.
- Getting refreshments.
- Reading, writing & taking part in activities.
- Personal care (experienced PA required).

Journey Mapping

Journey Mapping can help empower participants to tell their story of interacting with and navigating your service. It can also help to illuminate the connections – or blockages – between your service and the wider system that your users (or intended users) are trying to navigate.

GDA members felt journey mapping was a powerful way of centring their experience and charting the efforts often required of disabled people to navigate complex barriers to access services that were not designed with their needs in mind.

-To road-test journey mapping as an inclusive co-design tool for harnessing disabled people's expertise, we first sought to **recruit a diverse group of participants**, in terms of age, gender, impairment type and background. We **reached out through diverse networks**: GDA's LGBT group, our BAME disabled people's network, young members' forum and our network of disabled parents, to recruit a group of disabled participants with a huge range of different life experiences (including those in work or learning, those with young families, those seeking asylum, and those who are often isolated and disconnected) as well as diverse access and support needs.

We **asked what support or access needs participants had, and worked with them to identify ways to remove barriers** – including **offering multiple ways to participate**: in small groups or one-to-one, face to face, by phone, email or messenger.

We designed inclusive materials to introduce the project and enable informed consent (offering time and support to ask questions and reflect on this) and then to support the discussions: **using plain English supported by images** for those with low literacy, with any images audio described for those with visual impairments. We **provided alternative formats** where needed e.g. Braille, translations into other languages, or plain text resources emailed in advance for those who use screen readers.

Using a colour code can help those with literacy, memory or comprehension difficulties to distinguish different elements or questions within a discussion. To make this inclusive for those with sight loss, we used **'traffic lights' as a discursive equivalent**: red represents a barrier, green represents a step forwards or progress on the journey, and amber represents the efforts or steps taken in between.

Rather than focus on a specific service in our road-test, **we put participants at the centre**, asking them to think of a time they faced an issue that they needed support with. For some this was related to their housing, income, work or education, or a health and social care issue. Participants were **prompted to describe their situation at the time**, and think back to the **first steps they took** to address it. Did they know who to contact for support? If not, how did they find out where to go? What steps did this involve – phone calls, web search, asking trusted friends or family? Physically visiting a drop-in – how did the travel and access it? What interactions did they have when they arrived?

We prompted participants to reflect on each step, using the traffic lights framework: what worked smoothly, what were the challenges, what did they have to do to overcome them?

In a **follow-on reflection and analysis session**, participants drew out learning from their own stories about what changes could have made their journeys smoother and easier. Their stories were typed up in whatever format they could access (native language, Braille, Easy Read, large print or audio described), and participants were supported to map sections of their story on large sheets of poster paper, reflecting throughout on each part of their journey to draw out learning from the barriers, hurdles, or successes encountered. Support needs were carefully met in this process: speakers of other languages were supported by interpreters, liaising with staff facilitators; those with visual impairments were supported by staff to segment Braille or audio-described versions of their stories and use tactile materials to map connections and reflections. E.g. foam letter stickers to pick out key words; ribbons and pipe cleaners to mark shapes and connections. Those with limited dexterity were supported one-to-one to direct a personal assistant to work with the materials.



James, who is visually impaired, reflected on the ‘disempowering experience’ of trying to access social housing following his divorce.

“It was always a sighted world, even though I requested things in an accessible format. I heard where to go through word of mouth – I dropped in at the office. ‘Take a ticket’, they said. But how do I do that? Someone else who was waiting had to help me. But I didn’t know which desk to go to, even when my number was called. I never went again by myself. My second visit, I took a PA. We filled in a form to apply for 2 bedrooms so my son could stay with me – I was going for shared custody. After two years on the list, they showed me a place – it was a one bed. That’s when they told me I’m not eligible for a two bed, because my son was living with my ex-wife. It was an emotional blow.

They pressured me to sign the missive. I asked for time to think about it, they said if I didn’t sign I’d go to the bottom of the queue and be offered less nice houses in different areas – I said I was visually impaired and had a brain injury, said I’d really struggle outside the area I’m familiar with. But they didn’t take that into account. I didn’t have time or access to digest the information.

In the new place, they never showed me how to work the intercom – to this day if someone buzzes my door I don’t know how to let them in.

I didn’t have a cooker, fridge, carpet or curtains. No one in the housing department told me there was a grant for this – it cost me over £1,000. It was GDA who told me I could get a grant and helped me apply.

When I was using the cooker for the first time, usually 11 o’clock is the highest setting, but turns out the one I have is a European set-up. I couldn’t figure out why, after three attempts and two hours to boil an egg, nothing was happening.

The consequence of having no accessible information: I accrued debt that I wasn’t aware of, over a period of two months. Rent and council tax. They were communicating with me in formats I couldn’t use. They were sending me letters. I didn’t know about Universal Credit until I’d run the debt up. I explained it and they said, ‘Tough – you owe us over £600 rent.’ I didn’t know my way around it. Took me 11.5 hours to complete the Universal Credit form on my iPhone, because I didn’t have an accessible computer.”

Reflecting back on this journey, James identified many opportunities for service responses to change and improve to become more responsive and inclusive. Journey mapping can be complemented with a collaborative sense making approach to unpacking ways to redesign and bridge these gaps.

Prototyping

GDA are frequently approached by planners and consultants seeking accessibility perspectives on development and regeneration projects. We use our standard, inclusive outreach approaches to recruit participants: identifying groups or networks within our membership, communicating by post, online and by phone to support and encourage those who are interested to sign up, removing barriers by providing accessible transport, communication support and personal assistance to attend and take part. Then, crucially, a range of inclusive materials can be developed to enable diverse disabled people to engage with plans, blueprints or design ideas:

3D modelling

GDA was contacted by 'icecream architecture' when, on behalf of Glasgow City Council, they were planning 'City Wide Conversations' to help shape a redesign of George Square. Recruiting a small diverse group of members to take part in the Public Workshops, we arranged transport, personal assistance and an interpreter to support our members' participation.

Working with support in groups, participants used Play-Doh and other materials to change and develop a 3D paper model of the Square – they were encouraged to think about lighting and parking, to move monuments, add water – to reimagine the space with no limits.

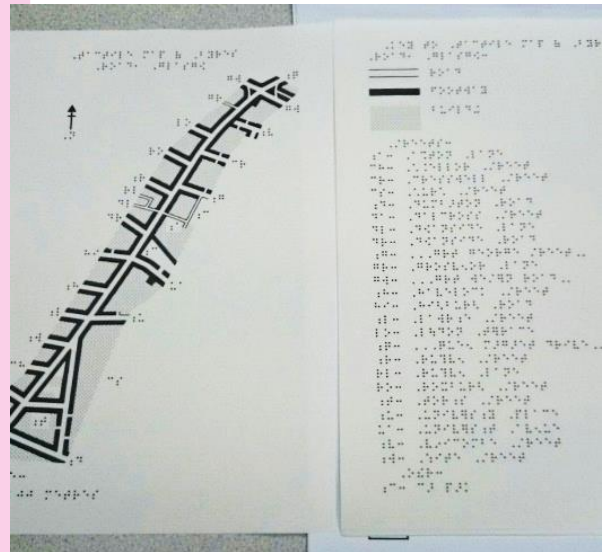
A scribe from the team captured the discussions in each group.

Participants then talked through their designs and their thoughts with the other groups.



Tactile Maps

Glasgow's 'Avenues' project sought engagement at various points from diverse users of Glasgow's main streets – after members raised concerns about barriers for disabled people using 'Shared Space' street designs, the project team proactively engaged disabled people in reviewing blueprints for future designs. We commissioned RNIB to produce tactile maps and images, and Braille versions of the maps and blueprints for the space, which helped not only those with visual impairments, but also people with learning difficulties. Videos were also produced to broaden engagement, and these were audio described, with subtitles and British Sign Language.



Software / paperwork prototypes

Diverse GDA members have worked closely with user researchers (URs) developing the processes, software and paperwork that will be used by Social Security Scotland. URs identified the relevant age groups for each topics, and GDA recruited through our networks as described above. Covering the costs of accessible transport and personal assistance where needed, URs supported GDA participants to test out prototype digital interfaces (e.g. using screen reader technology) as well as paper forms. Earlier sessions drew on participants' experiences of benefits assessments, to develop and test out prototype assessment questions.

Consequence Scanning

GDA members are passionate about the potential of Consequence Scanning to help build lived experience into decision making at the vital early stages: too many decisions, made without these insights, miss vital opportunities to remove barriers and often even create new ones as unintended consequences – excluding us even further.

Equality Impact Analyses are a statutory mechanism aimed at identifying these unintended consequences in order to mitigate them – but without the time, resources and imperative to draw on lived experience of those facing inequalities, these analyses will remain a limited paper exercise.

GDA members have come together with those designing and delivering policy changes, to highlight unintended consequences of decisions they may be taking – often too late in the process to effect change. We hope that involving diverse users in consequence scanning will become a routine part of early planning and decisions making processes.

‘Spaces for People’

To reduce traffic at school gates, a local authority bans cars from accessing the street during school hours – exempting blue badge holders. However for disabled people who don’t have their own transport, taxi drivers are blocked from entering the street - creating a barrier to disabled people leaving their homes, accessing services, facilities or appointments during these hours.

Disabled people have highlighted additional barriers created when street redesign takes place without our involvement: particular barriers have been highlighted for those with visual, cognitive or mobility impairments, when ‘shared space’ schemes remove signalled crossings, or install bus stops which require pedestrians to cross a cycle lane. Streets and public transport are already full of prohibitive barriers that make life more difficult for disabled people – each redesign should be seen as an opportunity to engage those with lived experience, to remove existing barriers and ensure new ones do not arise.



GDA member demonstrates lack of access to newly installed bus stop



GDA members speaking at Place Making Conference as Place Standard tool reviewed

Place-based approaches

GDA members have worked with designers of the influential NHS Place Standard Tool, to highlight unintended consequences of the framework and its use. Intended to aid collaboration and public engagement around shared purposes within a geographic area, minority communities of identity – such as disabled people, LGBT people, BAME communities – have struggled to fit their priorities into the categories and chosen emphasis of the tool.

The framework overlooked many hidden structural barriers – such as discrimination, cuts to social security, and access to social care and mobility aids and equipment – which prevent disabled people freely engaging in their local communities. Inclusive decision making with a place focus often focusses on smaller scale issues rather than these mainstream services, missing opportunities to reduce inequality.

Another unintended consequence of the increasing emphasis on the place principle is that communities of identity (such as disabled people, LGBT people, BAME communities) who are more likely to connect at city-wide or regional level, are disadvantaged and overlooked in decisions, engagement processes and funding criteria, and these hidden barriers continue to be overlooked.

GDA members tested the 2nd version of the Place Standard Tool to see how well it could capture and reflect their experiences of the places they live, and the issues they need planners to address. Diverse recruits were supported in groups to reflect on their priority issues, and see how well these could be captured within the questions and categories in the draft tool, resulting in these categories being probed and stretched, gaps and potential unintended consequences identified. Consequence scanning with diverse communities of identity should be firmly built in to any place-based approaches.

Collaborative Sensemaking

Being a user-led organisation, all of GDA's work is informed by ongoing collaborative sensemaking processes. A core group of diverse GDA members engage in ongoing capacity building and dialogue to inform the organisation's responses to the pressing issues disabled people face. Each dialogue builds on what has gone before, over our 20 year history, and uses community development approaches to support participants to contribute their own vital perspectives and lived experience.

Service Specific

When a specific service is being revised or redesigned, planners ideally reach out to networks of likely users, such as GDA's members. Engaging a community-led intermediary not only widens reach to include people who may be currently unable to access the service – but also eases the power imbalance involved in engaging a user directly, at the point of delivery. GDA members have been supported to feed in to new health centre designs, reviews of Accident and Emergency, and Out of Hours Support services, Employability support services, local regeneration funding bids, and much more. GDA members say they are more likely to take part if they know GDA are involved: the trust and track record of their own organisation means they know their access needs will be met as far as possible without resistance, and that their views will be valued and listened to.

Crucially, meeting access needs requires lead agencies to ensure resources are available for transport, personal / communication support, accessible venue and resources.

Planners outline the background to the engagement – sharing their understanding of the needs and issues. GDA prepare **accessible briefings** (Easy Read as standard, Braille or emailed in advance if requested by those using screenreaders) which draw together the wider context of related issues previously raised by members. This helps underline that **the discussion is not taking place in a vacuum**, and acknowledge previous contributions members have made on the subject. This helps allay frustrations that arise when repeatedly sharing the same experiences and aspirations with different powerholders, and seeing no change. **In small groups, each supported by note takers / facilitators**, participants share their insights and experiences of the issues at hand, their hopes and priorities for change. Note takers check in and review verbally what is being captured, to ensure participants are in control of the data being generated. Agency leads mingle in the discussions, probing for clarity or offering their perspectives. **A summary of key points is shared from each group and then discussed collectively to reach a shared understanding and set of priorities.** Next steps should then be outlined by the agency, and channels for follow up and accountability established.

It is also key to note that personal experiences shared may trigger distress and/ or require 1 to 1 support or follow up, with specific sign posting for the issue at hand and to ensure mental wellbeing of anyone experiencing distress. This should not deter agencies from listening and seeking these vital lived experiences – ensure there is staff capacity available to offer one to one interventions if the need arises.

Strategic planning

When Glasgow's Community Plan or HSCP Strategic Plan have been reviewed, GDA uses methods described above to engage a wide range of disabled people's expertise to shape our recommendations for the next plan.

For a broad ranging strategy, covering a huge range of services and issues, this engagement may be split thematically into different events or break out discussions.

Short, accessible briefings and discussion questions on each section or theme unpack any existing proposals, or previous commitments, against context of local, national or international aspirations for rights and equality (eg Health and Social Care Standards, or the UN Rights to Independent Living) and priorities previously highlighted by our members.

Representatives from service planning and delivery are invited to take part and discuss the issues arising – these dialogues bring participation alive enabling monitoring and accountability, allowing service leads and service users to share perspectives to build towards a common understanding of the required next steps.

Too often this dialogue happens once plans are already in place, and prospects for change are minimal. Only when collaborative sense making is built in to the very start of these processes, and properly resourced, will we be able to design actions and solutions based on a full shared understanding of the needs and issues at hand.

Social Care Expert Group

Reform of Adult Social Care has been a long standing collaborative project at National level in Scotland – with a 'Shared Vision' produced by disabled people led organisations and launched by the government in 2015, then revisited by a wider range of stakeholders from 2017 onwards. GDA members have been supported to share their lived experience and priorities for reform through our Social Care Expert Group. Complementing the work of the national People-led Policy Panel, GDA's expert group connects the National reform programme with the level of local authority planning, decision making and delivery, sharing specific insights about how national guidelines and strategies interact with local delivery structures and organisational cultures. This type of collaborative sense making is vital to help illuminate and understand the gaps between policy and strategy at the highest level, and the frontline interactions these policies seek to guide.

User-led service design: GDA Connects

As one of the first pilot projects for the Scottish Government's Connecting Scotland initiative, GDA put our inclusive, collaborative methods to work to help rapidly address digital exclusion at the start of Scotland's first lockdown in April 2020.

With face to face activity suspended and disabled people at heightened risk from the pandemic and lockdown impacts, GDA's engagement networks quickly mobilised – we began to survey our entire membership through mail outs and wellbeing check-in phone calls, as well as using email, SMS, and social media channels – to identify key issues and concerns disabled people were facing, and to gather views and ideas on responses needed. A huge number of disabled people we spoke to were digitally excluded – lacking either a device, connectivity or the skills and confidence to get online.

When Digital Scotland quickly secured digital devices and connectivity to distribute, our ongoing member engagement enabled us to quickly identify participants for the first Connecting Scotland pilot. GDA's user-led, participatory approach yielded important insights that helped shape the roll-out of the project to date.

- Initially Samsung tablets were purchased for the project and piloted with GDA members: our members' diverse access needs highlighted that the accessibility features were not sufficient to meet the needs of those most digitally excluded.
- GDA was able to flexibly use our emergency COVID funding to procure a range of more suitable devices, as well as necessary adaptations such as stands and wheelchair clamps, external keyboards, cases with handles, styluses, to remove barriers we identified were stopping our participants engaging with their devices.
- We quickly realised initial data allowances would restrict learning and participation, with Zoom, online videos and browsing quickly running through the initial 15GB for 90 days. We were pleased to learn that our feedback on this issue influenced a decision to upgrade to unlimited data, as the project progressed nationally.
- With 20 years' experience delivering inclusive lifelong learning, we knew that initial plans to offer 2-3 short coaching sessions by phone would not be sufficient to overcome the doubts, anxieties and lack of confidence that digitally excluded disabled learners would be facing. Indeed, these short sessions left many learners feeling less confident, and even disempowered – unable to access email addresses or passwords that had been quickly set up for them.
- Coaching first-time learners over the phone is undoubtedly challenging – GDA's social model approach focussed on working with participants to remove barriers they faced. Unfortunately some learners believed that they were 'too old', 'too stupid' or 'too disabled' to learn and be part of the digital world, so

encouragement, patience and reassurances are vital to build trust and reduce fear.

- Unlike traditional skills-based programmes, there is no set curriculum or linear process. Learning is led by each individual and progresses at their pace.
- Finding the hook harnesses motivation, allowing the learner to develop skills as a means to pursue their interests. For example, crafters can access tutorial videos, patterns, or online communities to share tips and ideas; accessing back catalogues and trivia about a favourite musician or actor; learning how to shop online can alleviate some practical challenges faced by disabled people especially during the pandemic.
- Techniques to remove barriers were developed collaboratively, e.g. prioritising learning how to video call to enable 'screenshare' to assist with other learning.
- Hard copy guides were posted out to remind people of step by step key learning points and short 'how-to' videos were produced for sharing with the coaches and learners.
- Some learners requested email summaries of their coaching sessions to review, with agreed homework as a framework for the next session.

Mohammed is a 50-year-old asylum seeker. He has a mobile phone but has never been online, so has struggled to maintain contact with his family back home. Due to his mobility impairment, lack of funds, and limited English, the pandemic has left him stuck at home cut off from vital food and information. Along with lifeline food deliveries, GDA supplied him with a tablet which he says opened up huge possibilities: spending hours independently exploring it outside of his coaching calls, he was able to video call friends and family across continents, some of whom he hadn't talked to in over two years. Receiving news from his home country was an huge relief as he had no idea how COVID had impacted them. Mohammed says, 'I sometimes stay up all night on my tablet. It has opened up my world. I found an app for prayer times and reading the Quran in different languages. This tool has led me to discover new levels of meanings in certain texts.' Not only is his mind stimulated, but Mohammed has been able to take part in physical exercise classes which have helped him maintain his fitness and also connect to other people during this difficult time.

Margaret (74) lives alone and quickly became very isolated from her usual community, when shielding during the pandemic. Having never used technology or been online, Margaret did not feel it was for her – until she learned that ‘there’s a woman on the YouTube who does knitting patterns’.

With the support of her GDA digi-coach, the online world has broadened and enriched Margaret’s life. She has found an online community of crafters, and now purchases knitting patterns online, exploring more hobbies and interests: from looking up recipes to use stray ingredients, to falling into documentaries and crosswords. When Margaret expressed an interest in royal history, her digi-coach sent her a link for a musical about the wives of Henry VIII. Margaret said, ‘I thought I’d pass this lockdown just looking out my window. I can’t believe I’m in my lounge enjoying a musical about a topic I’m so interested in.’

Co-designing an approach to ‘Accessibility Statements’

The Scottish Government’s Digital team recognised the need for lived experience to inform how they would comply with new legal requirements to provide Accessibility statements on all web pages.

The Scottish Government team worked with GDA, and other organisations, to reach a broad range of disabled people – they liaised with each organisation, asking people what they need to feel comfortable taking part from the start of the research process. A fully accessible venue known to participants was used; transport and support costs were covered. Information was sent to participants in advance, in formats that worked for them. A participation incentive was also offered – this was given to participants in cash by GDA on the day, then claimed back as part of workshop costs – simplifying things for participants.

The workshops themselves used collaborative sense making to explore the purpose and potential of accessibility statements, in relation to the lived experience of disabled internet users. Background to the work was discussed and examples shared. A follow up session involved reviewing the data gathered throughout all the workshops, rating how far they agreed or disagreed the comments and suggestions gathered.

Some participants questioned the usefulness of the legal requirement – saying that if webpages were not fully accessible, a disabled user encountering barriers would not necessarily benefit from a list of which parts are accessible ‘If part of the site isn’t accessible they just have to say that, they don’t have to address it’. Participants advised that the best way to make access statements meaningful to disabled users,

would be to include details of who to contact and steps to take if there is a problem with the site's accessibility.