

Collaborating for Accessibility workshop notes

Introduction

Once upon a time, about 2012, a group of people decided to write a book about accessibility. They wanted to help other groups make meeting spaces more accessible to all sorts of people.

The group is called the Disability, Spirituality and Faith Network and the book is called 'Creating Welcoming Churches' (CWC.) And here's the disclaimer: we're not going to talk about spirituality, faith or churches today. We're going to talk about making information accessible and the collaboration you need to achieve that. But I'm using this book because it was the springboard for me to understand more about visual accessibility.

Most of the people in the Network are those with lived experience of impairment. They obviously know the score on all sorts of accessibility issues. I don't have that experience but I have supported someone who lived with impairment, my mother. Mum was a writer and historian.

In 2014 I was asked by Trish Harris, a friend of Mum's and a member of the Network, to be part of the editorial team to produce the book. It was a very interesting project and I learnt a lot about both accessibility and collaboration. After it was published there was feedback from many NGOs and individual readers that there's a great need for this sort of info in all sorts of contexts, not just churches.

The Network always knew it was vital that CWC – which talks about inclusiveness – was itself, inclusive. They planned several alternative formats and a large print version is the first of these. Other formats in the pipeline include an e-pub version (underway now) and an easy read version. As the Network has a very small budget, the versions would need to be produced as funds permitted.

The Network decided that there was value in an actual workbook that groups could use to work through the issues. Therefore, a large print version would be the first step. I was asked to be the managing editor for this version.

Trish and I decided we needed some help as neither of us knew much about visual issues. It was an organic process as we asked people we knew. First of all I asked Vicki Hall who I'd worked with for several years because she has experience of making information accessible. She not only gave me technical information, but she knew others who could help too. They were her mother and Nicola Owen, Paul Brown's partner.

We ended up with a small group of people with lived experience of visual impairment, expertise in providing accessible information, or both. We called them the 'visual reviewers' and collaborating with them enhanced the large print version – it made all the difference. They gave detailed feedback on everything, they looked in detail at each draft and they were particularly helpful about the graphics.

Today's speakers

All the Auckland visual reviewers were invited to today's session. So we have Vicki Hall and Paul Brown here, but two others were unable to come because they are unwell. As Paul wasn't directly involved in the large print version, and he's free for just an hour, it seemed sensible to

begin by focusing on his expertise and Vicki's. So we're going to do that and we'll come back to the challenges of the large print version of the book later.

Paul is, among other things, partner in Audio Described Aotearoa, which puts blind people in the picture, and senior disability advisor at the Ombudsman's office in Auckland. He's a member of Blind Citizens of NZ, who aim to make a blind bit of difference. Vicki is a freelance communications specialist who juggles eggs with no basket in sight and works part time with Paul. They will talk to us about their experience with making information accessible.

Vicki's notes are attached.

Writing alt text

Alternative text refers to online material. It is a written description which describes an image. We found it wasn't helpful to use this term for a printed book, so we coined the term 'extended caption' instead.

Exercise

Choose a cartoon from the book and write a description which captures all the information but leaves the reader to draw the meaning.

Debrief: How well do the descriptions capture the meaning of the cartoon?

Summary: How do we collaborate to make information accessible?

Members of the Network say that collaborating for accessibility is about letting go our own way of thinking. Remember:

- It's about what works for the audience
- It's important to collaborate with people who know the field including end users
- Don't rush – collaboration takes time and it is important to get things right.

What is one thing you'll do a little differently as a result of this workshop?

For more information about the Disability, Spirituality and Faith Network, go to www.dsfnetwork.org