

Case Study #1

Access Companions

"We began using Access Companions as part of an Outdoor Light festival in Weston Super Mare called Glow in 2024. We were working with a site that is very inaccessible. It's a park with steps and uneven surfaces and it was in the middle of winter, so it was dark, and there were lots of things about it that made the site very inaccessible.

There were so many variables that we felt like trying to put something in place for one person would become a barrier for someone else. A 'one size fits all' solution wouldn't work. We needed something that could adapt for each person – the easiest and cost effective solution was people.

We were fortunate to be in a position where, for that event, we could pay some people. So we had three people who were paid Access Companions all on radios and could be brought to the entrance to the site at any time to escort people and help with access. It was very, very successful. So we now have Access Companions at all of our outdoor events".

What kind of people make the best Access Companions?

"People who are friendly and open. People who are kind. People who are willing to listen and learn and not feel that they're the expert in that situation because the person who they are supporting in that situation is the expert on what they need".

What training should Access Companions have?

"I think attitude is most important as mentioned above. Understanding what language to use and knowing about the social model of disability would improve the confidence of anyone who is interested in being an Access Companion".



Photo: Paul Blakemore

How do people know about the Access Companions?

"We have a page on our website that provides information about what an Access Companion is. We also mention Access Companions on every social media post about the event. We also include a link and a contact to get in touch for any access needs beforehand or let people know that they can just tell us on the gate and we will get the person who can assist with access. We try and make it as clear and easy as possible.

We also have really good links with Disability Action North Somerset and Vision North Somerset and got them to put information out through their networks".



Photo: Paul Blakemore

What top tips would you like share with other venues?

- Talk to people in your community with lived experience who might be comfortable discussing that lived experience and speak to them in advance of the event.
- Involve your volunteers or fundraise for Access Companions.
- Invite people with lived experience to do a 'walk around' with the Access Lead two weeks before an event and discuss what barriers there might be
- Allow lead in time to resolve any access barriers
- Shout about it

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