

## Designing a space for everyone



Jess:

I'm Jess Thom. I'm an artist, writer and part-time superhero. I'm the co-founder of Touretteshero, and we were partners on The Hub and also Wellcome Engagement Fellows, so in and out of The Hub space a lot. I'm a wheelchair user with Tourette's syndrome, biscuit, and say the word biscuit and hedgehog a lot. Sausage. And sausage.

Sam:

I'm Sam Castell-Ward. I work for Heart n Soul at The Hub as the communications assistant. I'm also a Heart n Soul artist. And I've been talking about, yeah, how The Hub, in what ways it's accommodating to me as an autistic person.

Catherine:

Hello, my name is Catherine. I'm an artist, and I'm talking from the perspective of someone who has difficulty accessing and feeling comfortable in public spaces and venues. I experience chronic pain and have mobility and energy issues.

Jess:

It's great to see the video and see the summary of the sort of process that was gone through. I think I didn't know all of the elements of the process, but I definitely felt the benefit of the result. I think, for me, it was that space because I'd been using that space before. And then I felt as a wheelchair user and as a disabled person who often has some sensory sensitivities and needs to rest quite a lot, it had been a sort of usable space before, but then what changed was that it became a comfortable space and an easy space. And I think often I'm used to working in spaces that aren't easy to be in and that I wouldn't feel happy inviting other disabled people too.

And I think we've done lots of events and used that space because it's so flexible and it can be moved around and it can accommodate lots of

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different requirements at the same time. And I think that's because it's been thought through in a really... Lots of different perspectives have gone into making it. And I think sometimes there's this idea that those requirements cancel each other out when actually I think it's a really great example of how you can negotiate space and make flexible spaces.

Sam:

Yeah, I agree. Because I'd often found with other accessible places or accessible events that the idea that you were saying about the idea that some access requirements cancel each other out, but think at The Hub, my requirements can be taken into account as well as other people's. For some people at The Hub, they're most comfortable when they can make a lot of noise and stuff, which is something that I tend to not be comfortable with lots of noise. But then there's the sort of chill-out space or the kitchen. They're both kind of spaces that are quite good at blocking out noise. And so, if I'm finding it too difficult to work on my desk, then it's great how it's encouraged that I can go into the sort of chill out space or to the kitchen or anywhere really else in the space too. I can work somewhere I can focus more if things aren't noisy. So that's just an example of it accommodating different types of requirements.

Catherine:

Yeah. I think also I was really struck by whenever visitors came. Everybody seemed to feel instantly kind of at ease and they were really impressed with the space and wanted to spend time there. And I think there was a really brilliant balance of sort of professionalism and homeliness and creativity and it had a real personal touch. And I think it was really interesting when Wellcome were having other events that they wanted to borrow things from The Hub, like the beanbags and the cushions and things.

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And I specifically kind of remember being involved in the access audit and it just felt like there was so many corners in the space. There were all these hard edges and corners, and I was like, "We need cushions and like soft things," and I think we achieved that beautifully. And it was so nice to have space, a space where there were so many alternative seating arrangements and things on offer so that if you wanted to sit on the floor or lie on the floor, that was possible. But if you wanted to sit with a supportive chair or have cushions around you for whatever reasons, then yeah. I think everybody somehow was able to get a sense of what they needed in that space.

Jess:

Biscuit. I think for me it also felt like a high-quality space. Often, I think sometimes with events that relate to disability, it's like they're sort of pushed to the corners or happen in spaces where maybe they don't have the sort of resources they need to feel to do things in the best way, but they felt like there was a real value to us and a value to that space and I think that that definitely felt important to me. And that there was this amazing, there's the sleep pod, so there is actually sort of bookable spaces to rest. That meant that for our company, it's the only building in London that I can work in both the morning and the afternoon without having to go home. So just because of how different bodies and minds have been thought about, it gave us so much and it gives us so much as a company because someone had taken the time to make sure that there were those different elements in place.

Catherine:

Yeah. And I think lots of people got the benefit out of that sleep pod and the chill-out space. Yeah. I think lots of people enjoyed the opportunity to be able to have a nap during the afternoon if they needed to, as a sort of like power nap or something. So, I think loads of people were saying that they wanted something like that in their

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workplace. So yeah, it adds to the value of everybody's working day overall, I think.

Sam:

Yeah. And somebody that helped partly what time of day and how you're feeling, for me, was the things like lighting being adjustable. Like in the chill out space, there were blinds so you could kind of black out the room a bit to turn it down and sort of dim the lights and stuff and sort of make it sort of darker, if like me, you can find bright lights a bit too much. And also it was good how in the main part of The Hub, people were okay if I was to dim the lights a bit, adjust them a bit. Or people also want the lights up a bit, they say or we could sort out what level of light what was okay between us and stuff based on how you're feeling and how everyone else is feeling. It's good that people were okay when I said, "Can I turn the lights down a bit?" And stuff like that, and we could all sort out how the lighting, how we were all comfortable with it between us.

Jess:

We often talk at Touretteshero about creating spaces where people have permission to change space to meet their requirements and the power of that. And I think that The Hub space is a great example of how, if you thoughtful in your design process, that you can set up spaces that support that, that make those conversations easier and make it easier for people to say what they need.

I think, for me, it really mattered that the chill-out space was there, that it was not sort of used as a meeting room or that it was always there and always available and that it wasn't called a quiet space or something like that because I think I sometimes find that those spaces, especially when neurotypical, people are in control of them end up with quite prescriptive terms that then make me feel like I can't be myself in

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those spaces and that the sort of intention is there, but then maybe the invitation and the sort of openness of that isn't there.

So I think that all the messaging that you got from The Hub, whether it was the colours or the sunglasses or the arrangement of people, just sent me the message that, firstly, that you were welcome and valued, and secondly, that you could move it around and change it to meet your requirements, which is very unusual, I think, to have a space that communicates that so clearly and confidently and proudly.