

I'm Jenny, I'm the project manager on the Heart n Soul at The Hub project. I've been doing the kind of usual project manager type things, sort of keeping everything afloat. But the really nice thing about working on The Hub project was that I was also able to make use of other skills that I've had from my previous experience. So before being a project manager, I used to work as a music teacher. I ended up facilitating a lot of the co-research sessions, which was a real privilege to do and be part of. And also, I ended up supporting the Music Jams project, which meant I actually got to play music as well, which is, yeah, not something that you would expect from your usual project manager job. So this kind of flexibility and freedom within the role meant you could really bring all of yourself to the project.

I never ever thought that I'd be working on a research project. And so, to be working alongside people in the research world and actually having your kind of opinions and ideas kind of listened to, and also feeling safe enough and comfortable enough to speak up when you had an idea, or if there's something you didn't understand, feeling free and not intimidated to just ask was something really refreshing and also something I don't think everyone gets to experience in their work life.

Another really key part of my role and probably like the most important part of my role was, was to really just look out for people's wellbeing all the time and just kind of be constantly kind of checking in with people, making sure that they weren't overloaded, that they had enough to do, that they felt valued, that they felt like they were understanding what was going on. And I think this is the nature of working in a team that has people with and without learning disabilities in it. This is actually really beneficial for everyone because it gives everyone the permission

to kind of say, "Oh, actually, I'm struggling a bit right now," or, "I need some support with this." So this kind of sense of checking in on each other and making sure that everyone was doing okay sort of went across the team.

And yeah, I guess part of making sure that everyone was kind of feeling valued and feeling good about their role in the project was to always be kind of doing those extra things that would enable people to feel like they could take part meaningfully. So if we had a meeting and there would always be a mixture of people in that meeting, we'd always make sure that we talk in a language that everybody in the room could understand. And we do that as much as we possibly could. And always just checking in that people knew why they were meeting and what was expected of them. And then in addition to that, we'd try to follow it up with letters so some people on the team weren't necessarily so familiar with computers and emails. So we'd use phone calls, we'd use letters, we'd kind of adapt to people's preferred ways of communicating.

Before we'd have a meeting, we'd always make sure that we'd have like an accessible agenda. Melissa, the project coordinator, she'd always go through it at the start of each meeting, just to make sure that whoever was in the meeting would really, yeah, have a sense of what their role was in that meeting, make sure that they knew what was going on and what was sort of expected of them. This adds on quite a lot of layers to your work. You can't just send an email and that's it. You've got to be thinking sort of a few steps ahead all the time. But to then be able to see people to take part in meetings and sessions in a meaningful way and feeling really valued, it kind of made it worth the while.

So we had a meeting room called the Glass Room and this was a really great space to meet all together because the space just kind of worked for everyone in that we had comfy seating, so when we did our meetings, we could do them in a relaxed way. We used one whole wall to do a wall calendar so that people could easily come in and see what meetings they were involved in. And they could also see the date and what was coming up for them for the following three months. We also had our principles and our ways of working displayed up on the wall all the time. So these ideas were sort of constantly present for us and would always kind of be in our minds and just always visible. And we also had, and this is something that Heart n Soul has as well, is a round table. So if we were sat at the table to do meetings, which actually wasn't that often, but it was just this idea that everyone's voice was completely equal around the table.