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STRONGER ARTS  
AND CULTURAL  
ORGANISATIONS  
FOR A GREATER  
SOCIAL IMPACT

CREATIVE  
LENSES  
CASE STUDY  
**ACCESS**  
**ALL AREAS**

Author Ellen O'Hara

Interviewee Nick Llewellyn, Artistic Director

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Creative Lenses is a four-year project, running from 2015 to 2019, that seeks to make arts and cultural organisations more resilient and sustainable by improving their business models and developing their long-term strategic and innovation capacities.

To find out more about Creative Lenses and its publications, visit [www.creativelenses.eu](http://www.creativelenses.eu)



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#### CREATIVE LENSES PARTNER ORGANISATIONS



# ACCESS ALL AREAS

(AAA)

<b>Location</b>	London, UK
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.accessallareastheatre.org">www.accessallareastheatre.org</a>
<b>Mission statement</b>	Access All Areas (AAA) makes urban, disruptive performance by learning disabled and autistic artists. We believe passionately in the importance of including learning disabled artistic voices at all levels of society, to help create an artistic community that is made more vibrant, more varied and more relevant by including a range of voices.
<b>Organisation type</b>	Charitable Incorporated Organisation
<b>Main activities</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Producing immersive theatre</li><li>2. Artist development</li><li>3. Participatory projects</li><li>4. Devising and delivering the Performance Making Diploma at the Central School of Speech and Drama</li><li>5. Casting agency</li><li>6. Consultancy and training in working with people with learning disabilities and autism</li></ol>

## Introduction

1976 – Formed by Elsie Pilbeamas as The Rainbow Theatre Group as a project of Hoxton Hall (a community centre and performance space in East London).

1976-2007 – A record of 63 shows were devised and performed by The Rainbow Theatre Group during this period.

2007 – Established as a separate charity, the Rainbow Theatre, when Hoxton Hall lost its adult arts funding. Nick Llewellyn becomes artistic director. Operated on a project funding basis, with little infrastructure, serving a group of 20 members through a weekly project.

2011– Rebranded at Access All Areas with support from Big Lottery Reaching Communities grant; devised 5-year business plan and embarked on process of strategic development.

2014 to 2018 – Professionalization of services, building capacity and infrastructure.

2018 – Joined the Arts Council England funded National Portfolio, with clear and detailed forward business plan, cementing their position as a leader in their field.

## Key income streams

1. Trusts & Foundations grants 36%
2. Statutory grants 30%
3. Participants fees for the Spinning Wheel project 10%
4. Triple 'A' agency partnership fees 8%
5. 'Access to Work Scheme' a publicly funded employment support programme that aims to help more disabled people start or stay in work 6%
6. Box office and building-related 4%
7. Theatre Tax Relief 4%
8. Workshops and participant fees 2%

## Turnover 2017

£351,788

## Surplus/deficit 2017

Surplus £82,545

## Number of employees and volunteers

3 full-time, 5 part-time and circa 60 volunteers



**'BUILDING A  
BUSINESS IS A  
CREATIVE PROCESS  
AND YOU HAVE  
TO TRUST YOUR  
INTUITION'**

## The drivers for change

1. *Loss of long-term funding:* Having laid the foundations of their business model between 2008-13, Access All Areas embarked on another growth journey when this came to an end.
2. *Limited earned income potential through ticket sales:* Access All Areas are a relatively small organisation without the assets of a large theatre company such as a venue. Only 6% of people with disabilities are in work so their propensity to engage in paid for arts and cultural provision is low. Combined, this meant that ticket income was relatively low and so AAA had to search for other earned income opportunities.
3. *Changes to the service provision for people with disabilities:* Austerity measures in the UK from 2008 onwards has meant that many services for people with disabilities and their carers have been cut. Reductions in commissioning budgets by local authorities meant that programmes such as Spinning Wheel were no longer funded.

## The solution

AAA has successfully developed a diverse revenue model that simultaneously meets unmet demand and draws on their unique strengths. Earned income sits alongside statutory funding and grant-making bodies to enable a range of activities:

- Award-winning immersive theatre productions by learning disabled and autistic artists.
- Participatory projects such as Spinning Wheel, a multi-sensory music and movement project for adults with profound and multiple learning disabilities. Spinning Wheel is now funded directly by participant's personal budgets – amounts paid to people with disabilities to arrange the care and support that they need.
- Artist development via the Performance Making Diploma and follow on programmes.
- The Triple 'A' agency is an industry-first partnership with casting agency Simon & How to represent professional actors with learning disabilities.
- Consultancy and training in working with people with learning disabilities and autism, co-facilitated by an accredited workshop leader with learning disabilities and/or autism.

Crucially, all of their work is co-created by people with learning disabilities, which means their voice is authentic.

## The implementation

Access all Areas simultaneously created the performance company, casting agency, conducted market research for their training and consultancy offers, recruited staff and built organisational capacity incrementally over a 10-year period.

They became a charitable incorporated organization, a relatively new legal structure introduced in 2013, which allows for greater diversity of income streams and removes liability for the trustees.

Having positioned themselves as a leader in the field, AAA utilised an 'Elevate' grant from Arts Council England to capitalize on their success and to explore new earned income streams. 'Elevate' grants were awarded to organisations not in receipt of regular funding from Arts Council England that make a contribution to the 'Creative Case for Diversity'.

Traditional market research was coupled with one to one conversations and 'mystery shopper' techniques to test the demand for their training and consultancy services from a range of potential markets (television, healthcare, education, supported living homes, theatre).

The casting agency was created with partners Simon Howard, which combines the supply of high quality talent with coaching, mentoring, and training on best practice employment of artists with disabilities.

A full time Operations Manager and an Access & Training Coordinator were employed to help build a sales pipeline for these new strands of work.

## The results

The different strands of the Access All Areas model are symbiotic. The Performance Making Diploma produces a

pool of talented and brilliant actors who go on to form the performance company and create epic shows. This in turn creates a talent pool for the casting agency as well as engaging audiences, and most importantly challenging perceptions about theatre made with and for people with disabilities. By demonstrating both sector leadership and producing great art, Access All Areas have built significant brand equity, which enables them to deliver quality training and consultancy services that adds unique value.

The artistic vision going forward is to create one immersive, large scale theatre show, with a big wrap around outreach programme, once every two years. Only 4% of project grant applications to Arts Council England are made by disabled artists. To help address this, AAA will support artists during three research and development projects with partner The London Theatre Consortium in the creation of their own independent work and in making applications.

## Lessons learnt and advice

Simultaneously testing and building all aspects of the business was incredibly challenging and put a strain on the organisation. Growing incrementally was key and Access All Areas is now finding its rhythm.

**Find your niche and own the space:** Access All Areas are both experts in their field and sector change-makers, demonstrating leadership in their chosen niche.

**Place Art first:** First and foremost, your company needs to be making really great art, and you must have a really clear methodology for all of your activity. Access All Areas has a clear rationale for each strand of activity and how they contribute to the overall mission of including learning disabled artistic voices at all levels of society.

**Follow your gut instincts:** Trust your knowledge and intuition as an expert and test your assumptions through action rather than standard desk or market research alone.

**Know your business plan inside out:** Although you take a strategic role as a leader, attention to detail is key. Hone good story-telling skills and be prepared to defend every aspect of your decision-making with evidence and data.



**'IT'S NOT JUST ABOUT EARNING MONEY, IT'S ABOUT BECOMING LEADERS IN BEST PRACTICE'**

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Ellen O'Hara** is an independent coach and consultant in creative and cultural enterprise with 18 years experience spanning the private, public and third sectors. She has designed and delivered enterprise and business development programmes for Nesta and Arts Council England (Digital Arts & Culture Accelerator), Innovate UK (Enterprise Skills for grantees), British Council, Creative United, and the Clore Leadership Programme.

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