

## CapeUK and the Reflective Diversity Lab

*"Diversity can be invisible; consider individuals' needs that might not be obvious at first glance. But, likewise, don't put people into categories based on perceived 'difference'. Be aware of elitism in the arts; question and challenge where possible."*

- CapeUK staff member



CapeUK is the Arts Council England-funded Bridge organisation for Yorkshire and the Humber that connects children and young people to arts and culture. We experienced and developed a four-stage Reflective Diversity Lab process, including conversations with diverse individual practitioners and organisations, to give ourselves time to reflect on and work out how to improve the equality and diversity aspects of our Bridge work with arts and cultural organisations. NPOs, MPMs and other arts and cultural organisations across Yorkshire and the Humber will be able to take part in similar Reflective Diversity Labs in small groups, supported by CapeUK, on a half-termly basis throughout 2016-2018.

## The Activity

As a whole-staff team of 19, we had four structured conversations with Jo Verrent, Aidan Moesby, Larna Campbell and Balbir Singh around diversity and equality and the challenges arising for CapeUK and our work with cultural and education sectors. This gave us time to reflect on our existing practice, to explore how diversity could bring creative advantage to our work and to identify and make changes to policy and practice so, along with arts and cultural organisations, we are better able to help create the conditions to further equality in the arts, museums and libraries for children and young people.

## Learning and Insight

***“The opportunity to reflect on what diversity is helped me realise the diversity of diversity”***



- **CapeUK staff member**

The key moments during our activity arose in conversations with Jo Verrent, Aidan Moesby, Larna Campbell and Balbir Singh.

The first was really understanding how our unconscious biases impact on our work and organisation. Our conversation with Jo Verrent helped us appreciate both individual unconscious biases and collective organisational biases and how to mitigate against them.

***“Once somebody knows us, their perception of us changes. We are not what we look like on the outside.”***

- **Jo Verrent**

The second key realisation came during our conversation with Aidan Moesby. He helped us appreciate that mental health is at the bottom of the list of attitudes to disability (Scope 2014).

***“Diversity is hard work. It’s much harder to understand others who are different.”***

- **CapeUK staff member**

Larna Campbell gave us time to discuss and think about times outside of work when we had been involved in a diverse group, to think about the nature of the activity we were involved in and what the diversity of the group brought to the activity. This was very helpful, given that our current work environment is white, middle-class etc.

***“Good art regardless of culture is important. The artwork might not be culturally diverse but it is because I made it and have had culturally diverse influences.”***

- **Balbir Singh**

Balbir Singh helped us see that cultural diversity is about much more than the nature of diversity itself – it’s about what different people bring to the art form.

### Impact

***“I gained an understanding of different people’s perspectives (colleagues and visitors) and benefitted from the opportunity to think more deeply about and discuss the issues.”***

- **CapeUK staff member**

As an organisation as a whole, we have committed to the following actions:

- Individual ‘diversity’-related objectives
- Changes to policy – including a new approach to recruitment
- Admin and Operations team have developed and are now delivering a new Diversity and Equality action plan
- Developing Reflective Diversity Lab process to offer to arts and cultural organisations from September 2016
- Diversity is on the bi-monthly SLT agenda and on our monthly departmental meeting agendas

We recognise the need to be overt about diversity until everyone automatically works and thinks that way. So we have agreed individual and team-based diversity-related objectives, such as:

- Book accessible, welcoming and suitable venues, which cater for a variety of needs
- Monitoring success in attracting and recruiting diverse applicants by using

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equal opportunities forms and reviewing processes’

- Numbering process now in place to anonymise identity of job applicants on EO forms
- To ensure that diversity, access and inclusion are an integral part of the agenda for regional Local Cultural Education Partnerships
- To develop and seek funding for a programme around mental health, the arts, children and young people
- To develop and facilitate the Reflective Diversity Labs with arts and cultural organisations from September 2016

Following our experience of the Reflective Diversity Lab process there is now a much more open culture/conversation amongst staff about diversity in general. It is ok to talk about things that, previously, might not have been understood, appreciated or considered ‘ok’ to share.

Mid- to long-term changes include planned changes to CapeUK policies and the development and delivery of the Reflective Diversity Lab process for arts and cultural organisations as part of our Bridge work.

***“I feel that my understanding of diversity strengthened, regarding how broad diversity really is. The sessions enabled me to adopt a more in-depth thought process around diversity and analyse diversity issues beyond how I was approaching them before.”***

**- CapeUK staff member**

We have already made changes to our recruitment policy, removing the need for a degree, for example, and seen an 18% increase in BME applicants as a result. We are hoping that the long-term impact of changes to our recruitment process will lead to a continued increase in diverse applicants and a subsequent increase in conversion to employment with CapeUK. Similarly, we hope planned changes to the absence management policy will enable us to retain staff with physical and mental disabilities. In addition, our CEO is actively seeking more diverse Trustee representation on our board.

We are developing the four-stage Reflective Diversity Lab model to be offered to NPOs/MPMs and other arts and cultural organisations, aiming for at least 72 of them to engage in this process, with support from CapeUK in our Bridge role 2016-2018. We are planning to engage some of the participants in our own reflective diverse practice process, as well as offering arts and cultural organisations the opportunity to identify which aspects of diversity they would like to focus on ‘in conversation’ too.