

Reducing stigma for disabled arts patrons

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This research was conducted by **Erin Ludwig** at **Corcoran Gallery of Art + College of Art and Design, USA**

Summary

This paper looked at what factors influenced the decisions of disabled people to attend arts venues. The research was based two surveys: one of 28 arts organisations and another of 50 disabled people. Both took place in New Jersey, USA. The surveys focused particularly on the ways in which stigma around disability influenced people's attitudes and behaviours. They found that stigma was a barrier, and that arts organisations underestimated its potency.

Both surveys were distributed through existing networks and are therefore based on a 'convenience' sample

Respondents to both surveys were from across different parts of New Jersey. The first included arts organisations of various kinds. The individuals surveyed by the second one was completed by people with disabilities including 'hearing impairment, wheelchair use, learning disorders, neurological disorders, brain injury, and autism'. Half of the individuals were parents responding on behalf of their disabled children.

86 per cent of arts organisations surveyed 'did not think an individual with a disability would feel uncomfortable attending an event at their arts organisation'

29 per cent thought that stigma could deter attendance at the arts, 'but not at my arts organisation'. Of the disabled people responding to the other survey,

nearly half 'made some indication that their disability made attending arts organisations uncomfortable or difficult' and the same number thought that 'stigma was sometimes harder to overcome' than physical barriers.

The paper highlights four things that arts organisations can do to reduce stigma and ensure increased accessibility

The first is to assemble a disability advisory group which includes disabled people, the second is to evaluate existing policies and procedures for their physical and attitudinal barriers, the third is to train staff properly, and the fourth is to look at marketing and communications activity and ensure that it is genuinely accessible and welcoming to people with disabilities.

Keywords

stigma **USA** **access** **survey** **disability**

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