**Sarah Botterill:** Welcome everybody. I can see that we've got people joining us now. So, I'm just going to allow a minute or two for everybody to join before we get going.

Okay. I can see the numbers still going up on participants. I'm just going to wait a couple more, three more

Okay. So those numbers have them started to level off. So, I will start with the webinar. First, welcome to everybody who has joined us as participants and a massive welcome, and a thank you to our panelists. We're going to meet them all in a bit more detail, but I'll just briefly run through who we've got with us today.

So I'm personally very pleased to be welcoming Saba who is a journalist blogger and the Editor of *Made Possible*. And I should say a very old friend of mine. I don't mean that in terms of age, I just mean that we've known each other a very long time from when we went to journalism college together.

It's fantastic to have you here today.

I'm also delighted to welcome Matthew Hellett, who is an award. Winning filmmaker and features in the book Made Possible. We've got David Matthews here from Grace Eyre, and we've also got Jane [McMorrow] from Creative Future.

I think there's a few threads running through the webinar today.

We're going to be talking a little bit about how people have been adapting at this time; adapting services and personal communications, but it's also a real celebration I think, of creativity and the impact that creativity can have on individuals lives.

I know David is going to be talking about the friendship group [from Grace Eyre], and I'm also mindful that we're specifically celebrating that for Learning Disability Week this week. So that's very timely.

So welcome to everybody and I will just move on now [to] a little bit of housekeeping.

As you can see, there are captions appearing at the bottom of the screen. Those are provided by the PowerPoint presentation. They're not perfect, but hopefully they are good enough for everyone to follow along if those are useful for you.

We will be using the Q and A window to ask questions of you have any questions. Please do pop those in there for the panelists, my colleague, Annie is kindly joining us today and she's keeping an eye on that.

And if you're used to using the chat window, we've got that turned off today. That's because it doesn't work so well for people who might be using a screen reader to access the webinar. So, just use the Q and a window and myself and Annie we'll keep an eye on that.

Following the webinar, we will be making slides, a transcript and a recording available. There will be an email that goes out to everybody afterwards. So you'll be able to see that, and a feedback form.

We would welcome any feedback by the webinar or any of the issues that come up today.

I know we've received a couple of emails already with some questions. We haven't had time to look in those in great depth yet, but, thank you very much for sending them through.

And some of those things may come up during the webinar today.

So welcome to the webinar. I'm going to start in a second by just introducing AbilityNet, and how we can help people, as I said, we'll be meeting our panelists in a bit more depth afterwards. and then we will be having a panel discussion. I'll be keeping an eye on the time and making sure that we have time for your voices to be heard at the end as well. And to ask any questions, start asking them now in the Q and A box.

Annie and myself, keeping an eye on that and we'll come back to it later.

So just briefly to introduce AbilityNet….We are a charity, and we believe in a digital world that is accessible for everyone. We support people at home at work and in education.

We have a network of over 300 volunteers, who in normal times would visit people at home. We are providing and support remotely and you can call. I'll help line on the free number that is listed on screen to that number is 0800 048-7642, and you'll be able to look that up in the slides afterwards.

We also have some online support that we can offer to people. We have a product called My Computer My Way, which will tell you at quite a granular level, how to adapt the operating systems across a range of devices, if that's helpful [and] we also have a range of free fact sheets available. So yeah, if that's helpful to people to have a look at those sources afterwards.

We know that what we do makes a difference to our clients; from a volunteer intervention, we know that 80% of people better able to use technology, but we also monitor, , you know, more social impact and 76 per cent feel more independent for example, and 69% of people who have an intervention from one of our volunteers feel less isolated, and we keep an eye on those numbers. And it's great to know that for us, it's not just about the technology.

It's about making a difference and ensuring that people are able to make the changes that they want to.

So, I'm going to come over to all panelists. Now, as I said, I'd just like to introduce Saba. Are you okay to pop off mute there? Great. Who is, as I said for disclosure, is a really good friend of mine and I'm really delighted to have her here.

So there's a biography here covering all the many things that you've done.

But, perhaps we could talk a little bit about Made Possible the book, which has been released during the pandemic and, and just tell us about that and how it came about.

**Saba Salman:** Well, thank you so much for inviting me on and, yes, full disclosure. We are old friends. So, Made Possible is a project and a booklet came about purely because of my younger sister Raana, and she has a learning disability, fragile X syndrome. And growing up, it was very obvious to me that she didn't really get asked the question that most of us get asked as kids, which is, you know, what do you want to do when you grow up?

And there was no sense in a way that's she was extended the same treatment really that, , somehow success and aspiration and ambition, all of those things that, you know, we I suppose we, yeah, we extend to most people, it just didn't apply to her.

So Made Possible is a book that seeks to challenge those stereotypes.

And so instead of sort of pitying or patronizing people, , it's explains and it reveals that actually, you know we all have something to contribute.

We can all live successful lives. You know, we all have a right to do that and to define our own success. But yeah, ultimately it's a book, just make people think twice about kind of a population that generally are overlooked and shouldn't be.

**Sarah Botterill:** Thank you. And I think what you've said, the other thing is that word again, I come back to that word celebration actually, you know I've read it and it just comes across as quite joyful.

There's a lot of joy in there. Isn't there it's a real celebration of people's achievements.

**Saba Salman:** Absolutely. And I think the point is that the achievements in the book they're remarkable and they really are. Regardless of whether you have a disability or not, these are people who've achieved huge things, and I should also say that that doesn't mean it shies away from some of the challenging stuff, so yes, ultimately it's a very joyful, uplifting, powerful sort of positive read.

 As I said, the main point is to say, you know, we all have value. We all have worth.

**Sarah Botterill:** And I wonder if you'd like to say a little bit about SIBs.

**Saba Salman:** So SIBs is a small, but mighty charity that I'm a very proud trustee of, and it is the kind of organization that I wish had existed when I was younger when Raana and I, , and my middle sister Arbi, we were younger, but actually the, the role of sibs is to support adult and younger siblings [of] disabled people through life.

It's just a fantastic resource, really. There's not only a sort of a peer network of support, but it really made me identify as a sibling, , which I know sounds strange, but you know, a lot of the time the families of disabled people really are overlooked by a lot of sort of service providers, if you like. So the fact that since exists to really say that, you know, this is a group that also has support needs and plays a vital role in the, in the lives of people like my sister.

So, yeah, I love it.

**Sarah Botterill:** Brilliant. Thank you. I mean, I think that's a thread we'll also return to with Jane and David around peer support and mentoring and communities supporting each other, which seems even more poignant at the time that we are.

It would be great to understand about the crowdfunding, cause I think that's particularly relevant in terms of some of the challenges. And again, this will resonate with Jane about getting diverse voices out there and getting them heard.

So, tell us how you went about funding the project.

**Saba Salman:** [00:11:59] So yeah, the book is crowd funded with a publisher called Unbound and I'd never crowdfunded anything in my life. So I was slightly like a rabbit in the headlights The book was crowdfunded by some fantastic patrons of which I know you are one Sarah and early adopter of Made Possible so thank you for that, and if anyone joining us today is also a supporter and thank you because apart from my sister being the reason this book exists, and of course the fantastic contributors, like wonderful Matthew. It exists because of the people who got behind it.

So in terms of funding, practically it was, uh, technology really was at the heart of, of this project because I used my community and my contacts on social media, , primarily Twitter and Facebook and everybody really got behind it. And we funded the book in six weeks, which is quite astonishing really. And I think that shows. The level of support and, and the gap and the demand for something like this.

**Sarah Botterill:** Fantastic. Thank you so much. So, Matthew… Thanks for joining us. I was just wondering if you, I know you're a contributor to Made Possible. It would be great to hear a little bit about your work and in particular, your involvement with, Oska Bright.

Are you able to tell us a little bit about that?

**Matthew Hellett:** So basically, I've been on Oska Bright for over 10 years. But it wasn't until 2016. I got mentored for the Guiding Lights Scheme. Now I am head programmer for Oska Bright Film Festival. Next year, is out 10th Birthday. But because we can’t tour because of the pandemic, I was saying to Saba, we’ve had to put last year’s film festival online.

It's called Oska Bites.

So a screening will go up every month, or two months, until January next year.

**Sarah Botterill:** Great. And when does that start from?

**Matthew Hellett:** It started in the last two weeks in May.

**Sarah Botterill:** Okay. Fantastic. How has it been for you maintaining that creativity while you're at, at home and keeping creative?

**Matthew Hellett:** It's been okay, but it’s had its challenges. I was saying to my colleagues that in the past six weeks, I have had to programme a film festival called Barnes Film festival. That went very well but you need to discipline yourself in terms of working to deadlines.

But, I talked to my colleague, Dave, I talked to my colleagues at Carousel via Zoom or via a Carousel Arts project… And I have got that work all done.

**Sarah Botterill:** That's fantastic. It's great to see that that work continues, online. And I’d encourage people to look out for the online Oska Bright film festival and check in on your work there.

That's great. Thank you.

So David I was wondering if you could just talk to us a little bit about Grace Eyre, and the mission of the charity?

**David Matthews:** Yeah, I'm, I've been with Grace Eyre about 14 years now. It's a charity that's highly focused on being user led by, by our, our demographic and that's people with learning disabilities.

And our mission really reflects the voice of people. So, our mission is to deliver our charter, which was actually created through a group of ambassadors, doing surveys with people who've learned spirit it's about what, what they actually want to achieve, and our goal now is to provide every level of support we can to achieve that. And they have very, very, very similar goals to all of us, which is it's really lovely to be able to work in this sort of field.

So, the charity is on a long path and has, has been around for a long time as well.

I might part of the services connect to that sort of being part of their community.

Being able to learn, to travel around, being able to learn the skills to, uh, be recruited for roles, and educational things around health and wellbeing.

So, I I'm part of the team that deliver group activities that people join.

**Sarah Botterill:** Thank you. I think just hold that in mind, that group activity, cause it's something we'll be talking about in a second. So start by telling us a little bit about the, the heritage of Grace Eyre – you’ve been around for a long time.

**David Matthews:** It has been around for a long time. [the charity] was started by a very progressive person. Grace Eyre Woodhead herself, who was incredibly passionate before. Most of society even cared really, and started with a simple project of wanting to have the paper that would be an institutionalized in like the 19 hundreds period, to have the opportunity to come to the seaside is sort of like that initial impetus.

And it grew from that, and, and we've just past a hundred years of being formally a charity, but we've existed longer. It's about 115 hundred and we're continuing her legacy. That was just about people deserve and have the right to a full life.

Whatever that means for that individual. So, yeah, it's fantastic to work with a charity. That's got this legacy and we're doing a massive project at the moment with the heritage society to really capture that story, but also the, the language shift, the cultural shifts and things like that, that have happened through that time.

You know, we have a lot of historic docents with a lot of different language that changes all the time. So yeah, there's a really big project going on at the moment around, around grace as heritage and therefore, so learning disability as a whole.

**Sarah Botterill:** That's brilliant, and I've just pull these three threads together at the end, but now we're going to return to the theme of what's changed for you.

I think you've been quite busy haven't you over the last a few months? Tell us a little bit about how you've been having to change and adapt.

**David Matthews:** Yeah. Well, if I speak for Active Lives, which is one of the many arms of Grace Eyre, but we're, we're very much the group community sort of activities, whether they be learning how for Creative arts. And we obviously like everybody else suddenly got this lockdown and we changed from a 99.9% direct delivery to people with people coming together at a very social hub, to not be able to do that.

And that was a real shift for us. And we've had to. Be very creative very quickly, and we will touch on it a bit more, I think, but we have our friendship group, switch from being about social activities in the community, such as, you know, just going out for a night to being focused on our Facebook group, and that's had massive growth over that time.

And I definitely would talk about it a little while and the actual group activities.

We've just started trialing on online series of activities across the week to provide an activities, uh, up to seven days a week, for groups to come together. And, you know, that's starting to build popularity. It's been brilliant to see that transition, at the same time, like many other companies and charities, we're trying to figure our way out. Of, how can we operate within social distance and rules and things like that. So that's a whole different level of the challenge. And we now see that for probably the next nine to 12 months.

This online element is going to be really, really important for people to be able to connect. There may be many groups that, or many individuals that can't come back. Two measures that we can put in place right now.

**Sarah Botterill:** That's great. And we will definitely return to the theme. So I think what's coming up for me is that, you're doing really creative things so that everybody who's joined us today is actually coming up with creative solutions. So, some of the challenges that have been presented by the pandemic, and I'm really keen that we come back to that thread and talk about that in a second as well.

So thank you very much for that intro. Jane, over to you from Creative Future. I am really delighted to be joined by you today. And I think those threads are there for you. You're working with people focused on creativity.

So, tell us a little bit about who you are and what you do.

**Jane McMorrow:** Hello everyone. And thanks so much for inviting me to be here. It's great to have an opportunity to talk about our work.

Creative future was set up in 2007, and initially it was an, an artist-led organization. They were two artists who both themselves were living with mental health challenges and other challenges, and I think it was, it was first set up within an acknowledgement that there weren't the opportunities out there for artists who were living with those particular challenges and they wanted to change that.

And we've been continuing that work now for 13, 14 years.

And we it's about individual change for artists, but it's also about celebrating that diversity and it's also about how we can take those diverse voices into the mainstream and, and, and look at how, , they can. They can bring change on a much larger scale.

For instance, we work a lot with writers and we run a national writing competition, the Creative Future Writers Awards, and we have some fantastic national partners now who are supporting that initiative. For instance, we work with a big agency called Curtis Brown Curtis brand creative, and they run lots of online courses, , in creative writing and they donated one of their courses as a prize for one of our winners, but that engagements with the industry…

Increasingly their support to have those diverse voices heard is really starting to grow. And, the industry absolutely acknowledged that they weren't publishing enough.

There wasn't enough diversity within the writers that they were publishing and they're starting to acknowledge that.

But we've still got a long way to go.

So really, what we're about is seeing that artist as an individual and looking at them and seeing how we can provide support for the work that they want to develop.

We would just say that if you are an artist who perceives that you have a barrier to opportunity, then we'd like to hear from you when we'd like to look at how we might be able to support you in terms of developing your practice and your work.

So, as well as running quite specific programs of activity, we also run a whole range of sort of more drop-in opportunities around creative writing and the visual arts and absolutely acknowledging that everyone has a creative street somewhere.

And that we very much encourage everyone to, to explore that.

**Sarah Botterill:** That's brilliant. Thank you. And we'll come back to that theme. I think about around voices and getting those voices heard, which again is another thread that I think unites all of you and should unite all of us we need today. So, we'll come back to that.

**Bringing me neatly to our panel discussions.**

I think we've touched on, on some of this already around adapting and creative solutions. , so I wanted to come to you , David, if that's okay to talk a little bit more about some of those initiatives that you have mentioned already in terms of adapting, particularly the friendship group sounds really interesting. So tell us all about it?

**David Matthews:** Our friendship group, as I explained was set up originally to enable people to come together in a social environment to hopefully create friendships are real and meaningful and can sort of splinter off into their own activities.

So just like everybody does you meet up with a small group and one or two people really stand out and then you're having a coffee or go and swim in and that's its whole purpose.

And as lockdown came to the fore, We recognize that that whole ability to connect was going to be radically cutoff. So we tasked the friendship coordinator, which the lady called Charlotte, who I have to acknowledge has done amazing piece of work that they have been doing on this was tasked with focusing on our Facebook group page, which was really just set up as a tiny little thing in the background and it, and it only just sort of being reconnected and had about 25 members at that point.

We've not very much going on at the odd post, and we decided that that would be our source point. So, we would tell everybody to head to that. And by doing that, we would a give a mutual space that people felt safe to communicate and we could share updates for them. But also, we knew that we would need to get quite a lot of people to get a sense of community functioning within that environment to make it feel like something real is that, so we told basically everybody that we connect to join the Facebook group go there.

That's our one point for connecting right now and that's done brilliantly.

We now have over 166 members of that page. And you know, what I'm seeing on there now is not things led by Charlotte as it was in the very early days of like what people do in this week. What are people doing today?

I'm going to bake this. And two people just share in their story of their day and post in that they've created something, a piece of art, a puppet, or. Thanks. You know, we've, we've seen a lot of bread. We've even had someone win a prize from one of the bakeries for their bread, which was just amazing that, and they're able to show that to other people, their peers, who then comment and engage and say, that's amazing.

Oh, I'd love to know how to do that. So just really great community appearing and it's sort of getting its own life now. So, in the last two weeks, especially Charlotte's had technical difficulties with internet providers and things like that, which, which has led to some brilliant frustrated photos coming from her, but we've been able to say, well, the Zoom is still there. We won't be there, but go on it and engage.

And they're doing that. But because there's, this community already happened in people who are also continuing to create conversation. In all sorts of subjects. So, there we've got one person that really likes to run and they will share that their output of their app, of their run and, you know, talk about how they've stayed where have people share what they've been up to in terms of the June joy, the karaoke session, we've gone on zoom through friendship. And I think, you know, with another. Probably another 50 people that will just be a self-creating community that will continue to grow and where we're heavily. Focused on that at the moment we've been seeking funding to be able to expand it, to give it more resource, to really, really engage people, to be able to promote it beyond, , our core sort of contact point, because it's a space for all people with disabilities to join.

It's not restricted to just anyone that uses grace air services. It's for anyone with a learning disability to have a safe space to communicate. So, you know, one of the ways we, we had to think about it was the privacy. We wanted the people to be able to find it, but we didn't want people just to be able to randomly engage.

So, we have a, you can find it, you need to ask to join. And in that you agree to a few basic housekeeping rules, you know, and we give some guidance about staying safe, such as don't share your phone number in a post and things like that.

So, and that, that is a huge success for us.

**Sarah Botterill:** Yeah, that's fantastic. Thank you so much telling us all about it. I'm very curious as to where they're getting all their flour from as well, all the bread that they're baking. But I think, yeah, the peer support and, and the fact that it's become self-sustaining sounds really amazing.

Saba, I was wondering if I could come to you now and talk to you about, one to one communication and how you've been managing that as well.

**Saba Salman:** Absolutely. And I, David, I love that story about the breadth of craft and arts and people deciding for themselves what they want to make and sharing it. I just, I love it.

Anyway, so with Raana, Raana doesn't use the phone. She will text [but] very short text messages. So this whole period has been, it's just been really difficult because my family has not been able to have that, that face to face physical connection. So, while we have been communicating sort of through Raana’s support staff [who are] amazing. What we've lacked is that direct contact. So, we gave a video conferencing call with it; we tried WhatsApp video, and she just didn't like it. It just didn't suit her didn't work for her.

So, I started to make video messages for her, just recording a quick. Hello, and after a while I thought quite dull, just me standing here saying the same thing over and over again. so I began recording messages for her around the house where I've got her artwork hanging up or some flowers she's grown in the past that come up every year in the garden.

And this developed my, shared it on social media and quite a few other family members, people, themselves, and other siblings got in touch with other pieces of art that they made. And. So we created, or I created an online gallery.

We called it a happy art gallery and I realized now the acronym is hag, which is not great.

So I need to change that, but it, it was just an amazing, , very informal, , way of gathering together, beautiful things that people had made that made them happy. And. You know, from a selfish perspective, it gave me something else to share with my sister.

It's on my website and it's, it's just amazing.

It's about 50, 50 pieces of, of art, everything from soaps to knitted rabbits, paintings, lots of rainbows. I think there might be some bread there as well, but it's that, it's the combination. I think, as David was saying of community, communication and tech and when it comes together, the social good that comes out of it is, is just brilliant.

**Sarah Botterill:** Fantastic. And Matthew, I wonder if there's anything you want to say about that? Is there anything that you'd like to add about how you've managed to move the festival online and how you've been going about that?

**Matthew Hellett:** Because we can’t tour the festival because of the pandemic, we’ve put all of our festival online. It is called Oscar Bites. So, a new screening will go up every month, or every two months from May until January 2021.

I have been speaking to my colleagues and my Oscar Bright Committee. We all have marked Learning Disabilities. There are sometimes challenges on Zoom, but we do the best we can.

**Sarah Botterill:** Great. That's fantastic. It's important to keep that creative.

**Matthew Hellett:** Yes, it is. Without it, I would just feel lost. I would feel a part of my life was missing to be honest.

**Sarah Botterill:** Fantastic. Thanks for sharing that.

So, that will bring me on now to Jane. I wonder if I can ask you to talk about how you've been adapting and I think you've had a few challenges and some support along the way.

**Jane McMorrow:** Yes, we have run a very extensive program of creative writing workshops, which is all part of our Creative Future writers’ awards.

And that's a national program. So, we work with some amazing organizations. Across England and new writing North who are, who are up in Newcastle and Gateshead, and also the national center for writing and Norwich. And we run workshop programs in each of these, those areas, as well as down here with new writing South.

But as well as working with those agencies, we also work with a whole range of social enterprises and work and write and deliver workshops through, and that's really about extending our reach in terms of who we want to be able to, , take up the opportunities that we offer, because very often the people that we actually want to reach and the voices that we want to hear, , sort of.

Front and center in terms of taking those opportunity of knowing about those opportunities. So we really do work hard to make sure that those opportunities reach the people that we want to engage with for instance, we work with Preston Park recovery center here in the city, as well as an organization called Allsorts, who specialize in working with young LBGTQ people. We normally would [00:37:00] be running our workshops in the space in Preston Park recovery and pop recovery center [and] obviously we're not able to do that, but we have been able to move, I'd say about 80% of our program online now.

And we aren't delivering that online.

We're sort of fortunate in that creative writing lends itself quite well to an online offer, but of course, what is missing is that you know, writing is quite an isolating thing to do anyway, in particularly we work a lot of artists, a lot of writers who are living with mental health challenges. And, part of our program is to allow those writers to come into a room together. And there's been some really lovely peer to peer working.

That's come out of that. The workshops that we've run, but we're finding it still happening. Even online that people are making are engaging and they're sharing information and they're sharing, , email contacts or phone numbers, and they're starting to have those conversations after the actual sessions.

And also we have appointed our writer in residence, Akilah Richards, who some of you may know she would have been the writer in residence at Preston Park recovery center. That's obviously not able to happen, but PDC had been able to reach out to all of that community. And, you know, lots of people are engaged now in her online workshop.

So we've had real success there and we were able to respond quite quickly and our tutors have been amazing. And just adapting to that. I mean, some of them had already delivered online work, but some of them hadn't and they've made that move across really effectively. And we're now looking at sort of running some more opportunities online because there's been such interest in such an uptake in that.

And the other thing that we've been doing, which I think you wanted me to talk about with our zoom training, which was an extraordinary.

We're also, we're also very fortunate to be one of the partners in the hero partnership, which is a new program of activity, arts, health, and wellbeing, and that's four organizations in the city, the Robin hood health foundation, the old market, , Ourselves creative, a future, but also an amazing organization called diversity and ability. They're a national organization. and they have a base here in Brighton, and they specialize in working with neurodivergent Working with them. We've been able to, we've got a sense that a lot of people that having to make this move to use it using soon or using teams was a barrier.

So we worked with them to deliver some zoom training and some teams training… a short work, two hour workshop. each of the partners were able to offer in the first round offers sort of six places, three places to our communities. And we reached out and we had 80 people requesting that opportunity within 45 minutes, and I was really surprised at that.

Maybe I shouldn't have been surprised, but I was really surprised at the number of people who wanted that support. And it was really clear to us that from a lot of the people we work with, that is a real barrier for them. So, we're running another session next week.

We're looking at how we had quite a lot of visual artists who took up the offer on that first round. And we're also looking at how we can do track zoom training, particularly. For, uh, specifically for visual artists, particularly neurodivergent visual artists who engage in a very sort of a particular way, and we want to see how we can, , continue to support them.

It's all about funding, of course. And we're looking at where we can get the resource to continue to run them, but the first sessions were so brilliantly well received and it's enabled a lot of those people now to feel more confident about, , engaging online in this way. So. Yeah, that's been a really, really exciting and unsuccessful piece of work that we've been able to deliver.

**Sarah Botterill:** That's great. Thank you. And I think it's something that a lot in what you say that AbilityNet would recognize, which is that technology can be hugely empowering, but it also can act as a barrier. And, you know, that's part of our role is to support people as much as we can to make the best of the technology. But in no way, do we think that it's easy and that it's a panacea for things either. I know there's a lot of questions here, so I'm going to have to cherry pick, but I think it would be great to talk about talked a lot about this already about getting those diverse voices heard. And I've put particularly at this time, because I'm particularly passionate about this, that; there are so many societal challenges around. There's a real risk that some of these diverse voices will get lost in the noise.

So maybe I'll come to you to start. And then, if anyone else wants to stick their hand up and chip in, that would be great.

**Saba Salman:** Yeah. I think this period is obviously challenging for all of us. Basically COVID and lock down, just increases some of these inequalities. And we talked about tech being fantastic, but also a barrier. , but well, widely, , people with learning disabilities face, huge experience, huge inequalities and everything from, you know, housing, employment, health, and we've seen some absolutely horrific statistics about unexpected deaths of people with learning disabilities that have risen, , compared to last year.

So, so what COVID does, uh, you know, this time is just exacerbate all of those things.

So I think it, that means that the direct voices peoples. Words people's stories. People's creativity. It's even more important to get that out there. You know, if that's what people want previously, because the dangerous that's, what is happening at this time and us as we go through as well, and we come out, we're starting to come out of this.

You know, what kind of landscape are we going to emerge into? And what's that going to mean for part of our population, uh, which is already sort of overlooked or marginalized or segregated having wants are sort of first to it. So that's, and from a personal perspective, that really troubles me. State one example, my sister's social care support, which is fantastic, has obviously been very unsettled. It's sort of, she's had a change in staff and all of those things that she relies on that part of her routine as it is for lots of us, we've all been unsettled by this, but those things really helped my sister thrive and. When that is fragile. , and when it's uncertainty, you don't know when it's going to go back to normal, the new normal thing that will have a massive impact.

So, yeah, I think all of these things we're talking about right now are hugely important now, more than ever really.

**Sarah Botterill:** And Jane, I wonder if I could come to you next, maybe, and talk about, getting those voices out there and I'm aware of the writing competition you did. And this was, I think strange coincidence happened thing of tomorrow.

When you look forward, what sort of a future do you see? And what's your role in terms of maintaining, getting these diverse voices out into the community?

**Jane McMorrow:** Yes, we did. Our theme for this year was tomorrow. We chose that pre lockdown obviously, and we launched in January and the competition in terms of submissions for so that you can submit, 2000 words, prose or poetry as well.

So, that closed at the end of May, uh, we had 1400 submissions to the competition this year, which is a record for us. I think lots of writers in lockdown with lots of time to write. So, but we've been really delighted with the response. We've, we've done that shortlisting now and, we'll take that forward to, to kind of deciding who's going to be our winners for 2020.

It'll be quite a different year because normally we would do a showcase event for all those writers, as well as their award ceremony. And we also do a writer stay, which we deliver as part of the lions and literature festival at Southbank, and that's been, and they've been incredibly supportive to us as an organization and allowing us to do that very high profile event.

And to allow our writers to have a real platform for their work, and of course, all those writers are writing from their own perspective.

We publish an anthology each year. This is actually, a couple of years ago because, the other thing that's happened, which is really interesting is that the Salesforce anthology have really increased since lockdown. I think people are being incredibly supportive. I've actually. Run out of copies at home because I keep putting you in the post with people who want to read them, but we do, we do print an anthology each year with all that writing in it, as well as, , a nber of guests writers that we invite to. Uh, to that, anthology in terms of that, those diverse voices getting an opportunity to be heard, but it's starting to have an impact within publishing. Saba you're probably aware of this as well. We are next week, I think is there's, , a publication called rethinking diversity in publishing is going to be out next week and that's been work. That's been put together with, uh, Goldsmiths university.

I've been doing that research as well as spread the word, which is a London based. A writing development agency and also the book seller, uh, which is the sort of industry publication with the things about books. So looking forward to seeing that that's been over a hundred, , uh, writers from diverse backgrounds who have contributed to that, and I think. Around the black lives matters. You've seen, , those voices being heard around the need for more diversity, particularly in publishing, but across the board really in terms of [00:48:00] arts and culture. , so we're pleased that we've been part of that moment to kind of get that change in place, and yeah, we've got, as I said before, we're still lots of work to do, but. Change is starting to happen incrementally. It'll always be incremental, I think. But,you know, you have those amazing Bernadine Evaristo. They're extraordinary. Evaristo has written the forward for this report. That's about to be launched and you know, you're starting to see those voices, come, you know, more and more, which is fantastic.

**Sarah Botterill:** That's great. , David, I wonder given that you have been looking back at your long history, if there's any kind of themes that you've picked up there, as Jane says, changes often incremental, do you get a sense of how far we've come and how far we have left to go and what some of those challenges might be?

**David Matthews:** In terms of how far to go. I think we're always in that position of when we're in the moment, we think we're where we're doing really well. And I think the journey has a very great distance to go, for a, for a true society based around equality and equity, looking backwards it's, you know, it, it seems to take so long for that incremental change to creep through. And there's very rare moments where a big step change happens.

But I definitely feel this moment is one of those. There's gonna be a big change as we all. Look at how do we return from this closed down sort of position. And we have a real opportunity to rethink and reimagine services, uh, for, for the groups that we're trying to support in then disabilities, and develop a new way of working.

And we're currently doing a lot of work at the moment using technology to, to complete surveys with people, to inform us of like, everything's different now, what do you want? Whereas for a long time we've had, well, this is how everything's set up. This is the structure. This is the day. This is your respite care.

This is the activities we can offer. Well, in, in my particular service, we closed the doors to that. And we have an opportunity to come back very differently and really start to have a big reflection of what people have a chance to say they want from us. So we're, we're quite excited at this moment from out of this very challenging situation, , to, to get a very significant change in a relatively short period, compared to how long it's taken in the past to, to move simple things, you know, even for Sabian, how to do activities in the evenings for the group that we tend to work with, often they will say they want that, but that could be very hard to get coordinated through the whole circle of support and things like that. Cause actually people quite often then need to change their one to one and things, but we have an opportunity to do online as well for some of this.

So we can create new activities that operate in the evening or on a Sunday and people connect in a way that's convenient to them. So, I think that incremental change does take a long time. And when we do look back, we see all sorts of stories and, you know, we've moved from, in essence, almost a prison style institutionalization to a hospital style institutionalization, to a living in the community in all sorts of settings. And. You know, still having elements of that institutionalization because they're quite often set up in the best way to support the largest number. Unfortunately, and now we're looking at, actually in, in the department, not like I work in. It's really important that when we reopened, we reopened in a, in a way that makes that about smaller groups of people that it makes it much more bespoke to them. I know that's, uh, one of those buzz words that gets thrown around and it's hard to justify, but I think we have the best chance for long time right now.

So, I I'm very, very. Mindful of that. That's

**Sarah Botterill:** Great to hear that, that hope for the future. And also, as you say, you know, taking on board user experience and, you know, kind of like. In real life, I guess, an online as well, what people are looking for in those environments. And so I'm mindful of time.

So we have had some questions coming through.

Saba, what your future plans are. Are there stories that didn't make it into the book or have you got a new book idea that has emerged from the work done on made possible so far?

**Saba Salman:** There are definitely more stories out there that deserve to be told. There weren't stories that, uh, that we gathered and then didn't make it in.

So that, that wasn't to answer that question, that, that wasn't the case, but yeah, there is something I'm working on. Developing from this, but for the moment, the kind of immediate aftermath of publication is three, three weeks old, the book, so I think, uh, Matthew and I, and all the other contributors, you know, we're just enjoying having out there finally, given it was just over two years in the making. So I think, to have out there is brilliant.

Yes, I would like to continue and develop some of the threads, uh, from it. I don't know exactly how yet. But yeah, I think it's just brilliant to have it there. And, and also to talking about other stories.

I hope it encourages other people to share their stories because these are eight incredible people defining success for themselves, in their own ways. And that's relevant to everybody. Really.

Thank you for the question.

**Sarah Botterill:** [00:54:28] Great, and, there's a question here as well about how open to change all the organizations that providing services, and particularly around housing and daily living services. I don't know if anyone's got any experience of that.

**David Matthews:** I think I can speak on behalf of Grace Eyre, we have housing and community services and things like that. As you just heard me talk about for, for our active lives services, we're really open to this moment being a real opportunity to change. And I think grace fully is always. Looking at how do we improve? How do we adapt?

How do we reflect what people want? , and I think, you know, with a charity, with social history, it's still trying to always think that it's not doing a good enough job. , and I think if, if you have that in your mindset, that you're constantly looking for the next way to do something or the next way to improve something.

So I know that for Grace Eyre, it's a really important element of. Now, and our future is to constantly be challenging ourselves to, to better reflect what people are asking for. , so yeah, I hope that that is something that's reflected across the community as

**Sarah Botterill:** And that was another question as well, which is to do with how you've been adapting your services, which is whether you've had to step in at all in terms of the community, have people being, being, following the rules, has there been any kind of, and if so, how have you managed that as well?

**David Matthews:** Yeah, I would believe this would be in response to the friendship group where I talked about we have some rules or guidance and so far, no, one's pushed the line. It's been approached with a great sense of community and I think, cause we do have that sort of, you've got to go through that door to get in. And we approve it. So we keep maybe potentially people that may look to take advantage of the situation. We sort of may see that coming through in the invites, but to my knowledge, we haven't refused any invitations. We haven't had any particular breaches of the rules, but our, our agreed sort of response to it is to initially have a conversation just like we would when we're trying to support people to understand, relationship boundaries, friendship, boundaries, professional boundaries, uh, because quite often we have that situation where the professional relationship is seen more as a friendship. Uh, and actually there's a, there's a relationship there that that's not what we want to create there for them. That's not our role, and so we've always taken the approach of educate first, you know, hopefully we won't ever get to the point where we. Half the band, someone from the Facebook group, we, we would tread very carefully in that area, but we do respect the element of safeguard in that we have, we are helping coordinate this at this moment.

It is designed to be a safe space, but definitely starts with a conversation if anyone did push. But so far, we haven't had any issues in the three months that we've been heavily promoting it. And that might be down to the numbers. You know that that is not so huge yet that there's that at risk, but yeah, we haven't had it, but we would discuss first.

**Sarah Botterill:** Thank you. And I think we've just got time for one final question and I've seen somebody else ask Saba, how Raana has received your videos, and how they've gone down with her?

**Saba Salman:** Well, what a great question. The ideal thing would be for Raana to send me video back. I'm still, I'm hoping one day that's going to happen if she wants it to, and that she sends very minimal, uh, characteristically, minimal text messages back. So I got one that said good, which was high praise; and another one said, uh, that said that that's kind, which is when I, I talked about some of the art that we shared on the online gallery. So, uh, yeah, I mean, it's, it's positive.

So positive response, Raana always sends very short, but sweet messages back.

So I know that, , I know that she appreciates that.

Interestingly, my mother has also been sending video messages and Raana has actually been asking my mother to send her more. Which is interesting, because I haven't had that demand. So I think there's a kind of hierarchy in the I'm in the popularity stakes here within the family that I'm going to have to, you know, I'm getting quite competitive about that, but I know she likes them and I know cause I've spoken to her staff about it as well.

So, yeah. Thank you for that question.

**Sarah Botterill:** That's great.

So I think we've just got a couple of minutes left.

So I would just like to, again, thank all the participants who've joined us today and to thank all the panelists, I think has been a really great discussion. And the word that is singing out to me is celebration.

I really feel like it's been, a theme that everybody has talked about.

And I'm really curious about what comes next from all the organizations and the individuals that we've spoken to.

When we post the information afterwards, we will also put up. Some related links. So I'll make sure that includes Oska Bites. Cause it'd be great to watch some of those, those films and see how that's all coming together.

Jane would be great if you could keep us in touch about when their next anthology is too.

Yeah, do keep in touch and let us know how all the projects are going.

I know that zoom ends quite abruptly just finally to say again, a big thank you to all of you for joining us today.

And watch out for the email and the update and all the information. So, thanks everybody and take care.