**PODCAST 3: Broader measures: for those who can dedicate some money to welcoming working class people**

A warm welcome to this podcast, which includes measures for those who have a budget for inclusion and accessibility, whether large or small, or who want to make a case for their organisation dedicating time and/or money to equality, diversity, and inclusion. This could be in the form of a few hours of paid staff time, or a dedicated sum put aside for working class inclusion as part of a broader EDI strategy.

It’s great you have some money set aside for inclusion, that you’re thinking of setting some aside, or that you want to try and convince others in your organisation to invest in this. To have a budget for inclusion demonstrates a commitment to it, but I also recommend you listen to this in conjunction with the free measures podcast because – thankfully - not everything costs money.

The measures I will suggest here cover: EDI labour and use; the practicalities and accessibility of your screening space; outreach; family-friendly measures, including things for young adults; we’ll consider donations and budgets to ensure all working class people, both colleagues and audiences, feel welcome at your organisation.

One of the things you can do to ensure greater inclusion of working class people is to have someone who has at least a chunk of their time dedicated to this, and perhaps EDI more generally.

This might be an existing team member, who has both the lived experience and the work experience – or whom you are willing to invest in so they become proficient in EDI – or it could be a consultant who you bring in for a specific number of hours, to work on a set project, or to deal with EDI strategy overall.

A consultant can audit, conduct research, speak to staff individually or in focus groups, create and analyse anonymous surveys, help to create strategy, deliver training and workshops, and so much more. A colleague who is not trained and knowledgeable in these things should not be asked to do any of them simply because that colleague has lived experience of being working class, or gay, or Black. You get the picture.

The people selected for EDI work are often those already treated as tokens, because of their identity, for example, and are expected to complete EDI tasks without adequate training, recognition, or reward, and can become the scapegoat if anything goes wrong.

What is important for working class inclusion and all EDI, is that people with lived experience are listened to, rather than spoken at or on behalf of, but also that a staff member with lived experience isn’t expected to take on the EDI labour in addition to their own role, and with no time, financial, or career progression reward for that.

It’s also important to remember that EDI work is emotional labour. You’re likely not asking them to conduct a task they feel neutral about, but rather one that involves an aspect or aspects of their own identity, which may have received negative treatment, personally and/or professionally.

The best EDI work is done by those who have significant expertise of EDI work and methods alongside relevant lived experience.

The professionalisation of EDI in recent years, especially since the killing of George Floyd and the increased interest in Black Lives Matter beyond Black communities, mean, thankfully, it is no longer quite so acceptable to get a current employee in a different role to be the face and brains behind diversity in your organisation.

But please also choose your consultant carefully as it is, unfortunately, an unregulated field and those without sufficient knowledge and experience do harm.

If you have someone who can dedicate themselves, in whole or in part, to EDI, this means there should be space in their workload to collect and make use of diversity data. Diversity data can help you to take a climate check of EDI in your organisation; identify overall trends as well as individual issues; fulfil legal obligations; apply for accreditations and funding; assign budgets; and can be used to evaluate your EDI journey and report this, internally and externally, with confidence and transparency.

Ensure that when collecting data, GDPR is adhered to and that you make clear when asking people, whether employees or audiences, for their personal information, how this is going to be used. This is, again, where an EDI strategy comes into play. It’s important not to simply collect data thinking it could be useful in future. Instead, decide what you want to monitor or need to improve and what information you, therefore, need to collect and how best to collect it. This could be audience feedback forms, staff questionnaires, round table focus groups, to name just a few. Remember, too, that people should never be pressured to share personal information.

Moving from the overall climate to home in your space. How welcoming, inclusive and accessible is it, not just to you but to everyone who could use it? Reach out and ask people for their opinions but do make sure there is the time and/or budget to be able to make at least some of the changes suggested so people know they have been listened to and taken seriously.

Many aspects of a welcoming space are covered in the Audience and Staff podcasts, so do listen to those.

Not everything might be apparent to you. Gender-neutral toilets, for example, are also a class issue because much gender presentation is about having the time and money to invest in make up and clothing, for example. Is there room in your organisation for individual toilets rather than cubicles in a gendered room? Each of these could be wheelchair accessible and with a baby changing space, to ensure maximum accessibility and inclusion, thus removing the need for parents, wheelchair users, and those requiring a gender neutral space to share the often lone accessible toilet.

I am aware that changing spaces and making space aren’t always possible, but if they are within your budget, it is great to have a room or rooms in your venue dedicated to the audience in a different way to your screening space and your bar: this room can be used as a ‘Quiet space’, which is great for many things, including working class people feeling overwhelmed and needing to take some time away from the main event, for example an uncomfortable drinks reception as part of a screening, but a quiet space is also useful for those who are neurodivergent, people who need to breastfeed, and so on, depending on the event. Be aware, too, that all of these things are not necessarily compatible at once.

The quiet space, can – say, for example on mornings and weekends, be used as a non-quiet space, but rather an onsite crèche – more on this shortly – to ensure that parents are able to come along and watch a film without any other childcare available.

The key point is to have a space, if at all possible, beyond the screening room and cafe, which can be used to meet some of your audiences’ needs which will then allow them to be able to watch a film as comfortably as possible at your venue.

This room can have a range of uses at different times, including outreach events where local schools are invited in.

A key way to ensure working class inclusion is to attract audiences as young as possible, through partnering with schools, being as parent-friendly as can be, and getting your inclusive message out far and wide.

Many cinemas are already great at outreach, but an ideal would be that every state school with children who are working class and/or in poverty has an active connection to an independent cinema in their region.

You can start small, by reaching out to just one local school and communicating with them, not to them, about events for their pupils.

Then do outreach as frequently and with as many schools as you can, especially those schools with young people who won’t usually have access to independent film or your cinema. Some organisations do tick an outreach box by running events for children whose parents absolutely do fit the typical indie cinema-going demographics. While this is great, it won’t ever be as impactful on individual kids’ and their lives as involving those who would never get the chance to attend an independent cinema, theatre, or art gallery. Start small and you can open up entire worlds.

Schools are a great starting point, because teachers often welcome such activities and kids aren’t held back by their parents’ finances and fears relating to independent cinema.

Children need access to the broadest possible range of culture to decide what they enjoy, and without value judgement. The whole spectrum from ‘low’ to ‘high’ culture. Working class children need to be given the feeling that all arts spaces are for them. And I say ‘given the feeling’ because we have a very active role to play in how included or excluded people feel. It’s not all on them.

Think about kids’ lives beyond school: offer cheap family tickets and be mindful that not all families are two parents and two kids. Those in poverty are often less likely to be. There is a financial penalty for single parents for so many things like holidays and tickets for days out. How can you do this differently?

To be truly inclusive of working class people is to consider options for *all* children as well as childcare. This helps working-class families and families in poverty two-fold: by ensuring parents and carers have some time to enjoy culture for themselves beyond the home, and to give children in situations where money is tight access to a wide range of age-appropriate film, which not only entertains but also shows them that cultural spaces and events like independent cinemas and festivals are for them, now and in the future.

An absence of childcare keeps a barrier to many film, arts, and cultural events firmly in place. It is important to highlight that childcare is often bound to socio-economic privilege and the finances to pay a nanny/childminder/babysitter/nursery. For those who struggle to meet childcare costs in order to be able to undertake paid work or those for whom childcare costs are prohibitive to working, and who, therefore, never or rarely get a break from parenting and caring duties, employing someone to look after children in order to take some leisure time is simply not an option. Only the relatively wealthy can afford childcare in addition to the cost of a regular cinema ticket, plus transport to get there and so on, rather than simply watching a film at home. There is also a very gendered dimension to this when we consider the often unfair division of caring responsibilities and how these disproportionately fall on women’s shoulders.

Free and sliding scale tickets are needed, and should be more widely available, but to be truly accessible is to offer safe, registered childcare on site.

Can you offer a sliding scale crèche on one weekend morning, eventually extending this to both weekend days? Parents who can afford this can pay at the top or even middle of the scale and this will help to subsidise those who simply cannot afford to pay anything.

Might you be able to do meal deals like some supermarket cafes do where kids eat free with one adult purchasing a meal, or kids eating free without additional purchase at all in the school holidays? Chips, beans, and frozen broccoli fill hungry tummies and, although the families won’t be able to pay for events now, the children are learning that your space is their space. That’s priceless.

I list even more practical measures to be inclusive of children and families, not just working class ones, in both the free measures and the audience podcasts.

Think about other young audience members and try to offer not only cheap student tickets, but cheap tickets for those who didn’t get the chance to go to college or university. So many discounts for young adults are based on them being in education, with many others being left out if they cannot afford to pay full price.

Of course for people wanting to come and watch a film, any form of transport to get to the screening means additional expense. While it can be pricey enough to travel within a city, for those from local towns and villages without any arts and culture amenities, it can be both very expensive and time consuming to get to the screening venue.

Can you team up with a funding body or suchlike to offer travel subsidies especially for people in poverty from local towns and villages with no screening space?

Something else you can do is to put a pot of money aside for working class people, by asking those with spare money to donate. A dedicated fund to be used for people in poverty and/or working class people would be absolutely amazing. Ask your audiences to contribute.

I remember speaking about working class inclusion at a film exhibitors’ event and, when on stage, I told the audience full of film exhibitors that I, a working class person in a well-paying job, would be happy to set up a monthly direct debit for a number of cinemas and arts venues if they created a fund to support people who couldn’t afford to attend events. All the film exhibitors had to do was get in touch. No one did. That’s a lost opportunity.

Taking and making opportunities to improve things for working class people relies, once again, on staffing. Inclusion can be so much better when you have people on the team who understand that a tenner for a cinema ticket is a huge amount, especially when people are deciding whether to heat or eat. Everyone deserves arts and culture and an escape from daily life, so please do what you can to make your events welcoming and supportive – in all senses – of those in poverty.

If you do set up a fund, could this money also be used to support working-class filmmaking teams, who often have less film education, equipment, and fewer networks. It could support them both in making work and being able to attend screenings and Q&As about their work.

I talk more about all of these in the Audience and Programming podcasts.

I’m very aware that some of these might be things to aspire to, rather than practicalities that can be offered right now and that’s ok. Key here is that you and your organisation truly want to be as inclusive and welcoming as possible for those who are working class and in poverty.

The main takeaways from this podcast are to do what you can to create working class inclusion, whether this means giving time, money, space, two of these, three of these, and if you’re limited in all of these then invest what you can give – no matter how small – in children who are working class and in poverty.

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