

Project Crossovers Apprentice's blog



Challenges and Triumphs...

Reflecting on my time at PMZ as the end of my apprenticeship approaches

[I intend to write an open and candid description about my time at PMZ in order to present a clear and insightful picture about the organisation.]

Once upon a time a friend of mine forwarded a link to me on fb.... It was like this:

PMZ Project Crossovers APPRENTICE x 2 Posts SALARY: £10.66 per hour, maximum of 5hrs per week
As part of our Lottery Funded Programme 'Project Crossovers', our Apprentice positions are ideally suited to disabled people aged 25 yrs and over who are passionate about music and interested in developing their skills and knowledge within the field of community music.

Apprentices will support PMZ staff, including Music Leaders, our Disability Forum and our disabled volunteers. Specific responsibilities are flexible and will depend on the individual's ability. Learning will be shared by working with a filmmaker as part of our Legacy Training programme. Applicants will need to be motivated and enthusiastic individuals with a genuine passion for music.

I knew I had to apply! As ridiculous as it sounds, this job description was pretty much me!

So I wrote an application, quietly confident. Although, I read the advert over and over, making sure I had included everything that was asked. I cannot lie, I did not research much into the company.

On interview day I ended up turning up in a manual wheelchair as at this point I had hardly used my electric one and it had broken anyway. So I found myself sat outside the front office reading some of the signs sporadically dotted around...

'No Swearing.' I could hear myself saying in my head, 'Ooops, that means I can't work here then'. In verbal conversation, my language is filthy so I knew I would have to switch on the 'No swearing' filter in my head.

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I was approached by an over excited Jeany and welcomed. I regaled my tale of the broken wheelchair. She proceeded to walk over but two seconds later turned back laughing about not being used to pushing a wheelchair. I was taken in the room where I met Simon and Mike Canning. Mike is a wheelchair user and admittedly I had to recall some of my own experiences about how I wanted to be spoken to as a disabled person, quickly. Previously to my accident I had never spent time with or personally known a disabled person so I wasn't entirely sure how I could conduct myself, always including everyone in the conversation. In the interview I spoke about my disability and I reminded myself internally to stop looking like a rabbit in the headlights and make eye contact with everyone..... I realized that I really wanted this job opportunity. It suddenly made sense! That's why I was nervous and I had to *perform* confidence.

On my first day at work I went to a song writing session with disabled adults. I went into a room in my electric wheelchair and I was immediately chatted up by another lad in a wheelchair with severe speech difficulties. Overtime my friendship with Chris has developed, he still tries to chat me up every week. Overtime I also became friends with the regular guys who attend the sessions called *Reverb*. The first thing I learnt about these sessions was that Music Leader Anna Batson knows exactly how to make me scream with laughter as though I'm being viciously attacked. Something that I've become renowned for within the organisation, usually because Anna will abuse this particular skill of hers at the most inappropriate moments!

I learnt that these sessions were meant to provide some sort of therapy for the participants. It took me a few months to notice the difference between this and education. I expected these songs we wrote to performed to be a high standard. I couldn't understand why the participants weren't behaving and embarrassingly enough I would feel frustrated with members '*messing around*'. What I failed to notice was that these guys were having a great time whilst making music. Recently I've become frustrated with word *disabled*. It's an entirely insufficient label that categorises people into a box that is perceived negatively. As I write this I am imagining myself standing on a soap box shouting at cockneys, wearing Dickensian costume being filmed through a black and white filter!

When I began working with this group I struggled to make myself heard. At first I thought it was because of my disability or that I was the only girl. Then I realized it was because they're all young guys who are usually hyperactive. Particularly a young lad called Cullum who has now become a good friend that I enjoy talking to when I come in. Now if they are speaking whilst I'm trying to say something I just tell them to shut up comedically, this works! The most important thing I've realised, and it's come to me now as a *eureka* moment whilst I'm writing.....Confidence! Confidence transcends age, situation or purpose. With every group I have worked with, if I were to just get over myself and realise that although I may be feeling nervous or anxious about how a person might judge me because of my disability, they are just as, if not more nervous, self-conscious or unconfident as I am.

I have felt that as a person with disabilities I have been able to educate people I've come into contact with, particularly younger people. I've learnt songs and worked with a group of young female singers every Monday, led by Laura Hayward. Tonality is a sort of Glee group, except they don't prance around like overenthusiastic Americans, we're more of a choir. I have actually felt my voice improve very subtly whilst being a part of the group. It's been very empowering sharing my thoughts on performance. I hope more than anything that I have allowed these young'uns to not be nervous of someone with a speech disability. So that in the future, should they encounter somebody disabled they won't be afraid or feel self-conscious about communicating with them.

Another aspect that I will write about is my relationship with my work colleagues. For some reason that I haven't been able to work out, I have felt that the vast majority of people have always been very welcoming to me, but that others hadn't quite understood me yet. It wasn't until I spent time socially with everyone at the party that some other members of the organization realized I'm just as much of a person with a good sense of humour as them..... I don't know why this is, maybe it's just me being insecure, maybe I should approach people more confidently, maybe people were insecure about saying something wrong...

You see! There it is again confidence.