

Transcript: Caribbean Carnival & The Social Model of Disability

Presentation by Glen Greaves at The Open Road Carnival Conference (North), 12th March 2022. Hosted by Callaloo Carnival Arts

Good morning everybody! My name is Glen. I'm a Callaloo Carnival Arts Trustee, a Soca DJ aka 'Soca Haze' and Sound Technician.

My pronouns are he/him. Visual description: I'm a 52 year old mixed race man of Trinidadian heritage. Today I'm wearing a blue shirt and jeans. In this image I'm wearing a turquoise t-shirt and I'm operating mixing decks on a truck at Leeds West Indian Carnival.

I have dyslexia, functional neurological disorder, seizures, chronic fatigue, I experience memory loss as well due to the seizures. I also have a lifetime of Carnival experience from growing up in a carnival family so I have lots to offer.

Today I'll be talking about widening access to Carnival from my perspective as a DJ working on music trucks at Carnival.

The Social Model of Disability is a more progressive way of understanding disability.

We are disabled by all the barriers which exclude and discriminate (against) us, the problem isn't with our impairments it is the barriers that prevent us from taking our place in society.

So on Carnival day you'll see a typical big truck which looks pretty much like this. This is the standard truck that I tend to perform on. Soca music is a key element in the Caribbean and style of Carnival and the big truck is an iconic part of the carnival parade and a lot of effort and energy goes into making the big trucks safe, and rightly so, but there's work to be done on access.

Typically there are DJs, sound engineers, mixing deck, big speakers and a generator, often an MC or two. Some of the safety elements may include straps to secure speakers, earplugs, scaffolds, scaffold construction, hydraulic lift gates and stewards.

Carnivals don't tend to own a fleet of trucks and usually use hired vehicles so quality and size varies widely.

So performing on a big truck - yes that's me on... I think it's the same truck from before it might be a different one. Performing on a big truck. Access issues on a trailer include space to work, rest and play. Sometimes less than an arm's length is available, space for support if needed, getting on and off. Once the sound system is on the lift gate is no longer accessible, wires and trip hazards everywhere, promotional banners and decorative items fastened with cable ties - these hinder access on and off, particularly in an emergency.

What can open-ended planning for wider access look like? All trucks supplied with hydraulic lift gates, plan ahead for hired vehicles, lift devices on the side of the trailer or cab, access for DJs with suitable kit - this would be identified in access riders which I'll come to in a bit.

Can wires run overhead? Removes or reduces trip hazards for everyone, may require longer cables being supplied by the sound system engineers.

Promotional banners and decorations to use easy release ties, improve access on and off, speakers spacing through zoning creates space on either side of the trailer for a table, sorry, on a trailer for a table and chair either side of the trailer for access, as well as a reduction in volume for safer listening.

Access Riders. Routinely request access requirements by a range of communication methods, also talk to people informally to ensure they have understood what is being asked.

Lots of people don't define themselves as disabled due to misunderstandings about what is meant by the term 'disabled'. Access data can also help you capture information on new technologies.

Finding Solutions. Who can assist and or provide guidance on making reasonable adjustments? Disabled led organisations, local council events licensing teams, partner organisations, local businesses, etc, and you could put a call out to social media.

Reasonable Adjustments Roundup. Use access riders or ask about access requirements on registration forms and/or in more creative ways, insist on lift gates to load equipment on trucks, consider alternatives to flatbed trucks, build bespoke solutions - don't wait for the perfect solution, start taking action today! Aim for continuous improvement, we all require, we are all required by law to make our events and activities accessible.

Carnival is about celebrating freedom and none of us are truly free until all of us are free. And finally I'll leave you with this quote*, "Do the best you can until you know better and when you know better do better". Thank you.

*Maya Angelou quote

