

Transcript: UKON Careers 'Putting the Social Model into Practice: Access Works - Barking & Dagenham Carnival'

Presentation by Ros Alexander, assisted by Cleon Lord

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

NB. Apologies for the inconsistent sound quality during this recording. We've done the best we can to provide accurate subtitling, however, please note that some parts of the audio weren't audible for transcription.

[Isabella]

So this segment is entitled, 'Putting The Social Model Into Practice' and I'd like to invite to the stage Ros Alexander who is assisted by Cleon today.

Put your hands together please.

[Ros]

Okay, first of all thank you very much for inviting UKON Careers to speak today, we feel very much honoured and today we're going to have the opportunity to listen to many different segments and see some performances that have initially been very emotional for us, because it reflects quite a lot of the work that UKON's trying to deliver and also the work that yourselves are trying to deliver.

So it's been a very, not only educational and uplifting experience for us - myself and Cleon - but it's been very emotional as well.

So, I'm Ros and this is Cleon

[Cleon] hiya!

[Ros]

who is our Production Manager, but today also my Carer and looking after me. Today we've prepared quite a large presentation so I think what we're going to do is, there's sections that we're going to miss out, so that we stay on track with time.

Please have some patience with me: this is only the second time I am delivering a piece while I'm trying to read and look at the same time, so I'm

very much out of my comfort zone. I've done it once during Summer and this is my second time so I probably will stumble quite a bit but hopefully yourselves and Cleon will help me to get there in the end.

Thank you. Okay we intended to discuss quite a few segments with you today, but because of the time we're not going to - so I won't go through the contents

[Cleon]
Okay!

[Ros]
....

So this is UKON Careers. We were established in 2019, we're a CIC - sorry 2014, I'm reading and I know it's 2014 but I saw 2019. Thank you Cleon!
[laughs]

We're a CIC and it's quite confusing because we're called UKON Careers and people were wondering, "what, you're a careers company?" which we are, so basically our role is to use Carnival Arts to support our community - adults, young people - into education, employment and training.

The reason I've put something about the UKON Japanese cherry tree is because often young people want to know why we're called UKON and the story behind that is, the UKON Japanese cherry tree is quite an interesting tree first of all because it's green and yellow rather than pink and white.

It's very different and it's a tree that doesn't grow very well on it's own. I often told a story that in Japan what people do they invest a lot of time, patience and energy into the UKON tree and when they do that, the tree grows into quite a magnificent tree, which becomes part of Japanese culture and supports wellbeing and culture.

And we thought UKON wanted, was just right this is what we want to do so that's why we're called UKON and, so, sometimes people say "UK-on Careers" and we thought we'd have the tree black as opposed to green and we'd have the term 'UKON' in green so that's the reason the tree looks the way it does.

And we've recently changed the logo, haven't we Cleon?

[Cleon]
Yep!

[Ros]
Only recently, so previously the tree was a drawing by my daughter and now we've changed the drawing and we've put hands - so the leaves are hands now. If you look closely you'll see hands, they're sort of like helping hands and so on, thank you Cleon.

We'd like to play you a little video so you can see what our events look like.

[video soundtrack plays featuring Caribbean Soca music]

So we've just shown you a little bit of what we do. So, basically our aim is to support young people and adults into education, employment and training using Carnival Arts and to develop an understanding and increase participation in Carnival Arts.

And what we want to do is display Carnival in its entirety. So I was really delighted when some of you have shown that you not only display Contemporary Mas which is the feathers and bikinis, but also the Traditional Mas characters and costumes and the Old Mas characters and costumes.

At all our events you'll see all three elements. Not just one, but all three.

We want to change the conversation about Carnival and remove that conversation from that of a street parade into a more cultural and professional element which is embedded within the curriculum and that's again why we were so moved by some of the things yourselves said

because it's in line with some of the things we are trying to do. Embed it within the curriculum and to decolonize the concept of education, decolonize the way you see what professionalism is.

Why are the professional Carnival Artists not paid for the work they do? It's an interesting question, isn't it?

So we can't look at decolonising education in the way we look at training because we have got a lot of very professional Carnival Artists that are not

recognised because of the way we have colonised the very notion of education and training.

I thought I'd show you some of these pictures to show you how we work, so basically our work is all inclusive.

We do not exclude anyone - it doesn't matter what your ability, disability is - everyone is included in our delivery and the way in which we do that is to make sure at all our workshops and events we create an environment where everyone is welcome - that's the first thing and that's what I'm hoping these pictures will show you.

These pictures represent some of the pre-Carnival workshops that we deliver for senior citizens, adults and young people with disabilities and so on.

And we mix people - you can see we have a picture of a senior citizen and a little girl working together.

And, interestingly enough, this lady, who I spent much time with while she was doing a mask making workshop with us, ended up telling you all about her life during the war and that she just about remembers doing craft work like this when she was at school

And it was quite amazing listening to her talk but still working despite the fact she had arthritis in her hands and it helped to release that.

We do steel pan workshops, mask making workshops, headdress workshops, costume making workshops.

We do African drumming workshops, we do creative thinking which is developing resilience using creative thinking and Carnival Arts to do that.

And as you can see no one is excluded! Just have a look at the pictures here. No one is excluded, so we feel it's a frame of mind, it is an attitude and a belief that if you want to include, you can make the adaptations to include.

...

Okay, we move on to the next slide. Move on because I've got one minute now, haven't I? [laughing with the audience]

Okay these are all the different benefactors (beneficiaries?). As you can see we work with many people - I've put two pictures, one I couldn't figure out how to get it the right way up!

[laughing]

So yeah, you can see our senior citizens - bring that one back!

[Cleon]

Oh, sorry! I'll bring it back.

[laughing with the audience]

(Not clearly audible here)

[Ros]

Can you see our senior citizens in wheelchairs? With the steel pan sessions? It doesn't matter what or who you are, you can play the steel pan, even with a visual disability like I have.

You know, nothing is impossible and it's about believing that.

[Cleon]

Can I go forward now?

[Ros]

Yes, yes.

Okay, so, I thought we just, we didn't want to do an academic conversation with you today, these are just some of the practical things I thought would be useful. So we thought in terms of inclusion and supporting access one of the things we all need to try and do is try and get the message out into our communities that we are inclusive.

That's really important, our community needs to know what our events are so that you can motivate them to come forward. Quite a lot of times I find we don't do that.

Particularly when we publish pictures and images we just publish pictures and images of our events with specific types of people.

I think it's important to change that and that will encourage people to get the message out there. The other thing is that's really important is you need to be really, actively committed to your policies and procedures.

So you know we all have policies and procedures. They're there but then we plan our event and for some reason we've forgotten to include access.

We need to remind ourselves to go back to our policies and procedures and be proactive, revisit them. It needs to be regularly done so it reminds us that we need to include access.

Now I know I'm talking to the converted here but I guess we need to get out to, you know, Notting Hill - anywhere that doesn't, because it's possible, we do it in Barking and Dagenham!

One of the things that's really important, [talking to Cleon] I'm going to join these last two - increasing access and including people with disabilities.

In the planning process: how do you know what a visually disabled person will need? If you don't have them with you in planning or you don't ask them?

So I think we all need to reach out into our communities to the people who walk the walk and ask what makes [not clearly audible].

What it is that we need to do to make it possible for you to engage with our events?

You cannot know what my disability is, what my access needs are, you can only imagine - unless you ask me.

And I would like to give you - okay, risk assessments and event location, yes, we all know that, it's important that in our risk assessments (we do that all the time with people) access and everyone is included in the risk assessment.

Yeah and that's what helps us to remember that we need to do this, yeah.

And I think that's it. Venue location -

I'd like to tell you a little story about something that happened two weeks ago

which is an event I was going to

I spoke to the organisation [not clearly audible]

I was sent the details in an email which was quite tricky to read so I gave the address to the Uber driver

I got to the wrong venue and then eventually I figured out where I needed to go ...

When I got to the building there's a very small sign at the bottom of the building saying Venue I'd have to tackle two flights of metal stairs, that was outside the building.

But they knew that I had a disability and I don't think that they deliberately left me out. I think it's because people forget their processes, their procedures and they don't walk the walk so they don't remember to ask.

So it's not deliberate, but I could not get up two flights of metal stairs on my own and it was really challenging. So there's what I'd like to, the story I'd like to tell.

Do we have one more Cleon? And that's it, we're finished! And that's it - why do we do it?

For these smiles - that's why we do it! It is also love, isn't it?

You've got some quotes there, but just look at the faces. That's why we do it. Thank you!

[audience clapping]

