

Since 2009, Purple Patch Arts has existed to improve the lives and life chances of people with learning disabilities, complex needs and autism by providing innovative, inclusive, creative learning experiences for them and the professionals who support them. We run 11 Lifelong Learning Programmes across Yorkshire, exploring a wide range of different topics that engage and challenge, while working with participants to develop their confidence, independence, communication and social skills, and improve their mental and physical wellbeing. In addition, we regularly work with day services, supported living providers, libraries, Universities, schools and other organisations to deliver short term, funded projects that meet specific outcomes.

All of our work is delivered using The Purple Patch Approach, which includes creative methods such as art, drama, music, movement and multi-sensory activity. This allows us to work with a sense of adventure, adapting to the needs of our participants and creating environments where people can thrive.

Through our work we have extensive experience of gathering data from young people and adults with learning disabilities, using methods that are in line with our approach in order to make it as fun and meaningful as possible. We use a lot of qualitative data, including photos and case studies, as they really tell the story of what we do. However, we also recognise the importance of quantitative data for funders and for our own learning and development.

With any question we're asking, whether that's set for us by a funder, or we've come up with it ourselves, we start by thinking about the possible answers; sometimes there's just two options; we might ask 'have you done this activity before?' - the answer is yes or no. More often, there's more than two possible answers, in which case we'll be using a scale – a common example is the Likert Scale which has 'Strongly Agree', 'Agree', 'Neither Agree nor Disagree', 'Disagree' and 'Strongly Disagree' as possible answers. We then come up with a way of administering the question. Traditionally it's done with boxes and numbers, but that's no fun! We use sensory methods to increase engagement and so get more meaningful answers; we're still asking people to place themselves on a scale, but it's done in a more creative, accessible way.

Confidence is absolutely key in this work; it takes practice and experience, but hopefully the examples below will give you some food for thought and get you started!

- Put images up around the room and ask people to move to the one that represents their answer
- Get a big foam die and ask people to show you the number that represents their answer
- Ask the group to make a noise from very quiet to very loud, and ask each person to stop the group when the volume represents their answer
- Ask each person to choose a colour they like, then add food colouring to shaving foam until it represents their answer
- Tie a bead to a piece of string and ask each person to move it along until it represents their answer
- Tie up a washing line, ask people to decorate a tag with their name and tie it in the place that represents their answer
- Taste some sweets, then use the rest to fill up a jar until it represents their answer
- Build a mini garden in a box and ask people to put the number of model animals into it that represents their answer

Think carefully about the resources you use - images are better than words, but why not include something tactile? For example, instead of asking people to draw the number of flowers in a vase, you could use a real vase and fake flowers sprayed with scent. Finally, think about what else you're doing and try and build the evaluation in – if you're doing a session about dinosaurs, use dinosaurs! If you're exploring a piece of art, reflect that in the methods you use. It doesn't have to be expensive – you'd be amazed at what you can find lying round the house!

The same applies to gathering qualitative data. Rather than simply asking a question, we relate the question to a relevant creative activity. This allows for a more relaxed environment in which the conversation can flow more freely, an

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For example:

- Make playdough or slime to discuss who's important in someone's life; assign each ingredient to a person, adding smells and textures like glitter to allow for personalisation
- Decorate masks and use this as a prompt to discuss things people might be hiding from, and how they can remove that mask to achieve their aspirations for the future
- Make lava lamps using oil, food colouring, water and alka seltzers and use this to prompt discussion about feelings that are usually hidden but that might bubble to the surface

Whenever we've finished planning an activity we ask ourselves the following questions:

- Does it do what I need it to do? It's easy to get side-tracked and forget what it is you're doing!
- Is it accessible? Does it make sense? Is it clear? Are there multiple ways of accessing it?
- Is it fun?
- Can I resource it? Is it practical?
- Am I confident and comfortable doing it?

If the answer to any of these is no, then we rethink the activity until we're happy with it. This is a really useful way of making sure that we deliver high quality activities that achieve what we want them to!