

# **MOVING INTO THE SPOTLIGHT**

## **casting disabled actors**

**a brief guide for  
casting directors**



## the facts

- ▶ There are at least 8.6 million disabled people in the UK. This is one in five of the population. They include wheelchair-users, people who are deaf or hard of hearing, people with visual impairments, people with learning disabilities, short people, people who use crutches and perhaps, less obviously, people with dyslexia, diabetes and cancer — to name but a few.
- ▶ In broadcasting, visibly disabled people generally make up less than 1% of the on-screen total television population. In drama, real disabled actors are rarely seen. But this is set to change.
- ▶ In 2002-03 members of the Broadcasting and Creative Industries Disability Network (BCIDN) made a public commitment to increase the number of disabled people on screen. Commissioning Editors and Producers are being encouraged to hire more disabled talent. This is beginning to show up on screen, for example, in central roles in BBC1's *Holby City* and in Granada's *Coronation Street* and in Channel 4's *Teachers* as extras.
- ▶ The biggest buyer of advertising in the UK, the Central Office of Information (COI), now insists that disabled people feature in one in every five government advertisements. The COI also has a policy of casting only disabled actors for disabled roles.

▶ Research by the Independent Television Commission, the Broadcasting Standards Commission and the BBC (2003) shows that audiences want to see more disabled people on screen.

▶ The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA) means that you must give disabled actors an equal chance of competing for a part, and you must make any necessary physical and communication adjustments during the casting process.

▶ The Disability Discrimination Act requires that castings should be accessible.

So, under the Disability Discrimination Act you must not:

- refuse to see or consider an actor on the basis of their disability,
- reject an actor or encourage the rejection of an actor on the grounds of their disability,
- refuse to see or reject a disabled person attending an open audition simply on the grounds of disability,
- fail to make reasonable physical and communication adjustments during the casting process.

## golden rules

**DO** consider casting at all levels — principals, walk-ons and extras. Why not choose somebody short to play the lead in a new sitcom? Would not the streets of a period drama have been populated with blind beggars, amputees from a recent war etc? Disabled people have always been around!

**DO** first try to find a disabled actor to play a disabled character but also consider disabled actors for all parts, whether written as disabled or not.

**DO** include all types of disabled people. Did you know that fewer than 8% of disabled people are wheelchair users?

**DO** include in any advertisement for a casting session such wording as: 'if you have access requirements, please contact us first'. In most cases special arrangements will not be necessary or can be easily provided. For example you may need to:

- give a dyslexic actor more time to read a script or provide the script in a sanserif font, or on coloured paper,
- provide a script for a visually impaired actor in a larger font (say 18 pt),
- arrange a ground floor audition space for an actor with a mobility impairment,
- be prepared for a personal assistant to accompany an actor to an audition or for a visually impaired actor to bring a guide dog,
- book an audition room with an induction loop for an actor who uses a hearing aid.

**IF IN DOUBT, ASK THE ACTOR**

# where to find disabled actors

## **Equity Disabled Register 2003**

Available in print and on the Spotlight web directory. Equity has just under 200 members who have identified themselves as disabled. At least half of these feature in the Equity Disabled Register.

Email: [info@spotlightcd.com](mailto:info@spotlightcd.com)

Website: [www.spotlightcd.com](http://www.spotlightcd.com)

## **Equity Job Information Service**

Some Equity performers might have a disability but have chosen not to make it public. You can get to them by advertising in Equity's Job Information Service. This is a free service. Tel: 020 7670 0242.

## **Four All**

Channel 4's Disability Adviser runs a specialist database containing a wide variety of arts and media disabled professionals, including actors.

Website: [www.channel4.com/fourall](http://www.channel4.com/fourall)

## **VisABLE People**

This is an agency exclusively for disabled talent with a wide range of disabled people, including people with learning disabilities, on its books. This is a good place to get a fast turnaround.

Tel: 01905 776631

Email: [louise@visiblepeople.com](mailto:louise@visiblepeople.com)

Website: [www.visiblepeople.com](http://www.visiblepeople.com)

## **National Disability Arts Forum (NDAF)**

distributes EtCetera, a weekly email bulletin with details of jobs of interest to disabled performers and artists. You can place a notice in this for free if you are looking for disabled talent. Tel: 0191 261 1628

Email: [ndaf@ndaf.org](mailto:ndaf@ndaf.org)

Website: [www.ndaf.org](http://www.ndaf.org)

## **Graeae Theatre Company**

the UK's national theatre of disabled performers. It is useful to be on their mailing list for up and coming disabled talent and they may be able to give some immediate advice.

Tel: 020 7700 2455

Email: [info@graeae.org](mailto:info@graeae.org)

Website: [www.graeae.org](http://www.graeae.org)

## **Shape London**

This organisation can give you pointers to others if you are particularly seeking deaf actors.

Email: [John@shapearts.org.uk](mailto:John@shapearts.org.uk)

Website: [www.shapearts.org.uk](http://www.shapearts.org.uk)

## **advice on access & disability**

The following organisations offer a range of advice on access and support services such as sign language, alternative formats etc. It is important to give as much notice as possible.

### **RNID (for deaf and hard of hearing people)**

Tel: 020 7296 8000

Email: [informationline@rnid.org.uk](mailto:informationline@rnid.org.uk)

Website: [www.rnid.org.uk](http://www.rnid.org.uk)

### **Sign Language Bureau**

Tel: 020 8292 1091

Email: [slb@mdx.ac.uk](mailto:slb@mdx.ac.uk)

Website: [www.bslbeam.co.uk](http://www.bslbeam.co.uk)

## **RNIB**

### **(Royal National Institute of the Blind)**

Tel: 0845 702 3153

Email: [cservices@rnib.org.uk](mailto:cservices@rnib.org.uk)

Website: [www.rnib.org.uk](http://www.rnib.org.uk)

## **Disabled Living Foundation**

Advice on where to get hold of equipment.

Tel: 020 7289 6111

Email: [dlfinfo@dlf.org.uk](mailto:dlfinfo@dlf.org.uk)

Website: [www.dlf.org.uk](http://www.dlf.org.uk)

## **other advice**

### **Broadcasting and Creative Industries Disability Network**

BCIDN is part of the Employers' Forum on Disability and includes the UK's leading broadcasters and the Film Council. For advice and contacts about disability and broadcasting, film and industry training:

Tel: 020 7403 3020

Email: [jenny.stevens@employers-forum.co.uk](mailto:jenny.stevens@employers-forum.co.uk)

Website: [www.employers-forum.co.uk](http://www.employers-forum.co.uk)

### **Policy into Practice – Disability**

Published by the Independent Theatre Council, it is a useful, detailed guide on all aspects of using a disabled performer, plus a contact list of where to go for practical help.

Tel: 020 7403 1727

Email: [admin@itc-arts.org](mailto:admin@itc-arts.org)

Website: [www.itc-arts.org](http://www.itc-arts.org)

### **Disability Rights Commission (DRC)**

They have downloadable information on employing disabled people.

Helpline: 08457 622633

Email: [enquiry@drc-gb.org](mailto:enquiry@drc-gb.org)

Website: [www.drc-gb.org](http://www.drc-gb.org)

**This leaflet is available in alternative  
formats on request**

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