



Go Anywhere, Do Anything

A project funded by

City Bridge Trust



Evaluation Report

March 2017

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1. Acknowledgements

Share would like to express enormous gratitude to the following people for providing assistance with this report:

- Members and volunteers of the **Go Anywhere, Do Anything** project.
- Parents and carers of the **Go Anywhere, Do Anything** members.

In addition, we would like to pay thanks to staff and volunteers from **Share** who participated in the project, in particular to:

- Our Social Buddies, who volunteered in the evenings and at weekends to make this project a success. Without them we would not have done any of the things that we have. They have all been dedicated, supportive and made a real difference to our members lives.
- Venues across London, who went the extra mile to ensure that trips were fully accessible and fun for our members.
- Annie McDowall, original vision, putting together the funding application as well as supporting the steering group and providing monitoring throughout the project.
- Joseph Fitton, supporting members to ensure that their voices were heard, liaising with carers and providing support for the organising and running of the activities.
- Leanne Wood, overseeing the project management, evaluating and monitoring, and supporting the day to day running of the project.
- Robert Boyce, participating in steering group meetings, and evaluating the positive outcomes of the project.

Finally, we cannot thank the City Bridge Trust enough for recognising the voice of people with learning disabilities who asked for improved access to London's cultural opportunities, by investing in the **Go Anywhere, Do Anything** project.

About the Author

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2. Executive Summary

Go Anywhere, Do Anything (GADA) is a user led project set up in 2014, run by **Share** and funded by the **City Bridge Trust**. The project aim was to provide opportunities for adults with learning difficulties, to enable them to enjoy access to sports, leisure and arts in London.

GADA has been extremely successful. During its three-year period, not only did it meet all the original outcomes set at the beginning of the project, it also exceeded the original outcome. **GADA** was targeted to support 40 people. The project reached out to 55 people who benefited from the person-centred support provided by the volunteers.

In addition, the trips have been extremely popular and oversubscribed, on almost all the trips. Volunteers have had to run extra trips to meet demand. Going out on trips meant that members could take advantage of social opportunities and develop new friendships. This has enabled Londoners with learning disabilities, who would otherwise risk becoming increasingly socially isolated, to lead more independent and fulfilled lives.

The **GADA** project commenced in May 2014 and is due to end in May 2017. The project has achieved the immense success it has with only one full time equivalent staff member. **Share** would like to build on this work and achieve more for people with learning difficulties in the community. To do this, the organisation is seeking funding to grow the current project team, and to develop an exemplary model for other organisations in the same sector.

This report evaluates the impact of the work carried out by **GADA**. It explores to what extent **Share** met or exceeded the targets set. It also looks at the learning points and sets out recommendations for running a quality and robust service that benefits people with learning disabilities.

3 Background

3.1 What is a learning disability?

Types of learning disability differ hugely. Someone with mild disabilities may be able to live independently with minimal support, whereas someone with severe and profound disabilities may require 24-hour care, and help with performing most daily living skills.

A learning disability is defined by the Department of Health¹ as;

“Significant reduced ability to understand new or complex information, to learn new skills (impaired intelligence), with a reduced ability to cope independently (impaired social functioning), which started before adulthood”.

The term ‘Global Developmental Delay’ (GDD) may be used to describe a learning disability. GDD describes a condition that occurs between birth and the age of 18 which prevents a child from reaching key milestones of development like learning to communicate, processing information, remembering things and organising their thoughts.

¹ <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/learning-disabilities/a-to-z/l/learning-disabilities>

3.2 Challenges faced by people with learning disabilities

Having a learning disability means that people find it harder to learn certain life skills. The problems experienced vary from person to person, but may include aspects such as learning new things, communication, managing money, reading, writing, or personal care. People with learning disabilities want to have the same life experience as everyone else, including being able to do things that makes life more enjoyable and meaningful. They are presented with the following challenges;

- Health inequalities resulting in shorter life expectancy and higher levels of preventable disease, including respiratory illness; diabetes; and other complaints resulting from a higher level of obesity¹. People with some conditions are more likely to have early onset dementia. Many of these inequalities can be reduced by a more active and socially included lifestyle.
- In a time of austerity, fewer people are receiving personal budgets or they are facing benefit cuts. As a result, people with learning disabilities often lead lives that are less than fulfilling.
- People with learning disabilities are unlikely to be in paid employment and are more likely to be living in poverty.
- Bullying and harassment² is often reported.
- Those with a profile of autism are often unaware of autism friendly cinema screenings, and are unlikely to have access to a supporter who understands their needs and sensitivities to enable accessible experiences. This has an impact on their health and wellbeing.
- Families may be over-protective and keep learning disabled adults in a child-like state.
- People living in supported housing may have their choices constrained by the work patterns of paid staff and a resulting institutional approach to care.

These factors contribute towards making this already poorly served group, more needy and vulnerable.

¹ <https://www.nursingtimes.net/roles/learning-disability-nurses/obesity-in-people-with-learning-disabilities-possible-causes-and-reduction-interventions/5018063.article>

² <https://www.mencap.org.uk/sites/default/files/2016-07/Bullying%20wrecks%20lives.pdf>

3.3 Why was the project set up?

Share works with adults who aim to live more independently, preparing them for employment, seeking greater inclusion and leisure opportunities. The organisation has been working with disabled people since 1972 and 88% of the students live in the London Borough of Wandsworth.

There was a demand for a project to run activities that were inclusive and age appropriate, as well as opening access to London's wealth of opportunities to people with learning disabilities in Wandsworth and its surrounding boroughs. Living in London means there are lots of opportunities to enjoy the arts, a wide range of sporting opportunities available and access to parkland and open spaces. The city is a rich vibrant and cultural hub, which is important in ensuring a high quality of life. People with learning disabilities want to share the benefits of living in London.

Clearly there was a need to set up a project to allow **Share** students an opportunity to be socially included. Students often reported that they watched a lot of TV and went to bed early. Weekends for many would be very quiet, doing very little and they were glad to get back to **Share** on Mondays.

Here they could socialise with others and attend courses. Many lived with their parents, they relied on others for support to travel and to make arrangements to socialise. They therefore have different, and more restricted, experiences compared to their non-disabled peers.

In addition, it is often very difficult for people with learning disabilities to develop an interest and to maintain this. This is because;

- They may need support to get to places.
- They may need ongoing help whilst they are there.
- They may be dependent on staff who go off shift early in the evening.
- Attending community learning centres between the hours of 10am and 4pm, is not enough to ensure that people are living fulfilled lives in which they feel socially included.
- Their parents or carers overly worry about them being out and about, or out so late.

Most people who **Share** supported did not use, or even own a mobile phone and did not have a Facebook (or similar social media) account. The way that people with learning disabilities maintained friendships and made plans to socialise in the community did not reflect recent changes in the social use of technology. Instead, this was mainly organised face to face with the support of carers, support staff and family members. Few people had a social support network that they could contact without the support of another person.

There was a drive for people with learning disabilities to have equality of choice and independence in how they lived their lives. Whilst there were many excellent examples of people living fulfilling and autonomous lives in the community, **Share** found that they frequently worked with people who had their choices and freedoms restricted. The reasons for this are very complex.

Prior to obtaining funding to run **GADA**, **Share** knew from work done by organisations elsewhere in the country that when people organise community-based activities they grow in confidence and maintain their wellbeing. The project looked towards other organisations as a model, one of which was the **Stay Up Late** project in Sussex: (<http://stayuplate.org/>). There was no other organisation in the area at the time offering a similar or equivalent service. **Share** was ideally placed to deliver this project, with its successful history of supporting people with learning disabilities, in a wide variety of settings.

In the original funding bid the outcomes were set as follows:

- 20 people with learning disabilities will be involved in the first year, rising to 40 by year 3.
- There will be a minimum of 20 activities in the first year, rising to 35 in year 2 and 45 in year 3.

The expected outcomes were;

- People with learning difficulties are more confident in accessing mainstream arts, sports and leisure events. They're able to manage social situations, navigate the transport system, and take part on an equal basis.
- People with learning disabilities lead normal lives, enjoying social activities at the same times and venues as everyone else, and with the lack of constraints such as getting home early.
- People with learning difficulties report feeling fitter and happier as a result of their activities on the project. Where appropriate, people's health can be demonstrated to have improved e.g. those seeking to lose weight.
- People with learning difficulties are able to follow and develop their interests through buddy relationships with others, who share similar interests. As a result, they feel valued and benefit from companionship.
- The learning from this project will help other projects around the country and result in more people with learning disabilities leading independent and inclusive lives.

3.4 How was the GADA project managed?

GADA team

Leanne Wood worked as a Project and Volunteer Manager from the project's implementation. Jenny Ash worked as the Project Development Officer from May 2014-March 2016. Joseph Fitton was recruited in June 2015, and initially job shared with Jenny. He then took over the role fully in March 2016.

The team worked together to recruit, train and manage a team of over 20 volunteers, from various backgrounds. They also coordinated the events, which included coordinating transport needs and liaising with parents, carers, and support staff.

A working party was set up consisting of people with learning disabilities, who worked together to generate ideas for outings and events. The members worked with the **GADA** team, in particular with Leanne Wood and Joseph Fitton. This meant that any ongoing discussion, negotiation and decision making was carried out with the members' equal participation.

Social Buddy

All the volunteers were enhanced DBS and reference checked, and passed an interview. Members of the steering group were involved in selecting and training Social Buddies from the very beginning, ensuring that the project remained user led.

All the Social Buddies attended a half day induction, and received training in supporting people with a learning disability and/or autism, safeguarding and equal opportunities.

3.5 Progress in year 1

- **47** people with learning disabilities were involved with the **GADA** project.
- **16** members attended one or more of the **20** steering group meetings. A regular core group of **6** members who frequently attended evolved.
- **198** places were made available on trips.
- **31** separate trips took place in London. A wide range of activities were enjoyed, from going to the West End theatre, the Science Museum, Art exhibitions, Kew Gardens and Hampton Court.
- Members kept active by going on bowling trips, ice skating at the Winter Wonderland and dancing on the Southbank. They enjoyed live music, sightseeing in Greenwich and having dinner with friends. Vocal cords were kept warm at sing-along events, along with watching acrobats fly around in an upside-down cow!
- **16** volunteers were recruited and named 'Social Buddies', they committed over **400** volunteer hours. When asked to rate how much they agreed with the following statements - 'I am enjoying being a Social Buddy' and 'I have enjoyed the activities/ events that I have participated in so far' - **16%** agreed and **84%** strongly agreed.
- The volunteers began to build up a good relationship with members, and the team started to think about pairing people together so that interests could be shared.
- **20** members surveyed out of **47** said that they felt more confident in accessing, arts sports and leisure activities after **8** months of the project.
- **16** were staying out as late as they wanted to and **47** enjoyed weekend and out-of-hours activities.
- **19** people identified health and wellbeing goals.
- **80%** of members surveyed felt that they stayed out late enough; however, **20%** would like to stay out later.
- **100%** of members said they felt more confident about going to places and events. When asked how '**Go Anywhere, Do Anything**' made them feel, the responses were very positive. **95%** of people felt happier, whilst **80%** felt safer and more independent. **20%** of people felt they didn't know their way around and some felt left out or unsure of what was going on.

There was a high demand from people with learning disabilities wanting to explore London and socialise. The project was oversubscribed on **32%** of trips. On **5** occasions, the project had to duplicate a trip to accommodate the number of people who wished to join.

3.6 Progress in year 2

In year 2, the project grew from strength to strength, working with more volunteers to ensure that members had access to the best of London.

- During this period, **Share** supported **47** adults with learning disabilities to choose, design and attend **43** days out across the capital. **12** events more than the previous year and **8** more than the original target set of **35**.
- The project welcomed **10** new members.
- **47** people were paired up with a Social Buddy during the year, **22** more than the original target.
- The Social Buddies volunteered over **600** hours of their time to support our members in the last year, an increase of **160** hours on the previous year.
- **Share** successfully recruited **17** new Social Buddy volunteers, bringing the total number of active volunteers to **28**. **8** more than target, with a satisfaction rate of **100%**, as opposed to our target of **95%**.
- The project welcomed Joseph Fitton, a passionate Londoner and professional advocate.
- During this period members attended **7** different plays and musicals, and **5** different museums and exhibitions. They visited **8** of London's biggest tourist attractions – such as the Shard and Tower of London. They also enjoyed **12** different sporting activities; they even saw Rooney make history with scoring his 50th goal for England, at England Vs. Switzerland at Wembley!
- The project ran **10** steering group sessions with small and large groups of adults with learning disabilities.
- All the volunteers were happy in their volunteer role. They felt that **Share** provided enough information beforehand, and that the trips were well organised. Everyone also felt appreciated and treated with respect. All the volunteers were willing to volunteer for another **6** months or more.
- It was hoped that the volunteers would have the confidence and desire to eventually run their own activities, without staff support. **Share** was lucky enough to have attracted a fantastic pool of people, most of whom were happy to do this. This year, **10** activities were organised without any staff support, compared to **2** in year 1.
- **17** individuals enjoyed **5** or more events; unfortunately, this was **8** below target. The other **8** individuals have attended **3** or **4** times. It is the case that some of the members still do not come out as much as they'd like to, and this is often due to resistance from family. More work needs to be done to support family members who are fearful or worried about the person they support being out and about. This will always be a challenging area.

3.7 Progress in year 3

The project is now at the end of its three-year funding period, and is near completion. The project has surpassed all expectations set out in the original funding bid. Progress to date include;

- The original aim was to recruit **20** volunteers, there are currently **22** active volunteers. Over the duration of the project **34** Social Buddies were recruited.
- The project has supported more males (**56%**) compared to females (**44%**). The majority of the members fell into the **25-44** age group (**49%**), followed by **45-64** years (**33%**) and **16-24** years (**18%**)
- During this third year, **62** trips took place, offering **300** spaces to members.
- **55** members have taken part in various activities.
- In this period, a survey was carried out with the volunteers, this obtained a **52%** response rate. **100%** of the volunteers felt very happy, happy or OK about being a Social Buddy. In addition, **100%** felt appreciated, that they valued the on-going support needed. The trips they found were well organised and enjoyable to attend. **100%** said that they would continue to volunteer with the project, even after the funding ran out.
- Trips are now run by volunteers, with administrative support and planning provided by staff.
- The project has offered **136** trips to date.

GADA members on a tour of Wimbledon Tennis Club



4 Methodology

4.1 Issues for consideration when interviewing people with learning disabilities

Due to the members' challenges in reading and understanding the questions, it was agreed that staff from **GADA** would be present during the interviews with the evaluator, with the member's consent.

There were many challenges faced in interviewing, and collecting data. Often the members were unable to answer the question, and instead stated how they felt about **GADA**. Self-evaluative questions, along with literal and inferential questions are often hard for people with learning disabilities to answer. This is because the responses require critical and reflective thinking.

When interviewing, every day words needed to be used, with accessible language. If the person did not understand the question, then the question would be posed in a different way, or prompts given. It was important to ask open questions, not questions that have a simple yes or no answer. More time was allowed for the interviews, so that the person interviewed did not feel rushed into giving their answers. A relaxed conversational approach was adopted to allow for information to be gathered.

GADA members and volunteers getting ready to explore the Brooklands Museum of transport



4.2 Data collection

The **GADA** team carried out continuous evaluations throughout the project by compiling video and photographic records, as well as obtaining feedback from those taking part in the events, including:

- Before, during and after events.
- Steering group meetings.
- Ad hoc conversations with people.
- Social Buddy surveys.

Evaluations were carried out at regular intervals throughout the duration of the project by the **GADA** team – Year 1, Year 2. Feedback and a range of comments can be found in **Appendix 1**.

The following section explores data obtained by an independent evaluator to determine the success of the project, and examines whether there was a continued demand for it to continue.

4.3 Approach taken

Data collection took place in early 2017, to measure the overall success of the project, along with recommendations. 9 members were interviewed, along with 4 Social Buddies. In addition, 4 telephone interviews were carried out with parents and carers.

The next section includes a range of evaluative comments from members, carers and parents at the end of the project's three-year funding period.

5 Findings

5.1 Feedback from members

Mansoor

"I have been on trips, I have watched cricket, I love cricket. I have watched football matches and been to Legoland. I am very excited about going to the London Aquarium soon. I want to see Chelsea play soon, I am a huge fan."

Kellie

"I would love to go on more trips! Like going to the seaside. When the weather gets nice and hot I want to go to the seaside. When the weather is not so good then I like to go to the cinema. I want to see more trips like Frozen or Diversity – they are a dance group, I would love to meet them!"

The best trip was Little Mix, Leanne took us to the O2 to watch them. Emma Bunton from the Spice Girls was sitting in the same row as us!

If the project stopped, I would help Leanne to raise more money, I would be really upset if it ended, I would not be able to meet my friends from here. I have made lots of friends. I like helping out on the trips, it makes me feel happy. I like to see other

GADA members and volunteers singing their hearts out at the lucky voice karaoke club in Islington



people happy, I don't like seeing them sad.

All of the trips have been amazing! I was a buddy for someone, we went clubbing in Kingston. It was a late night, I got home at midnight! I would love to go again, we all had a great time, and we also did Karaoke. I want to see the project carry on."

Harish

"I go on the trips with Joe. I watch golf, I saw Fulham play football, it was good fun. Last year we went to a club, we stayed out very late! I got home at 3am! We also sang in a club, it was karaoke. I like going out a lot, it makes me feel good. If this project finished I would feel sad. I would like to go on a bowling trip in the future."

Kelly

"I went on the London Eye with my friend Daniel. I liked it a lot, we saw the Tower of London. I don't want the project to end."

Daniel

"I have been to the Winter Wonderland, we saw Mamma Mia at the theatre. I like going clubbing too, mingling and meeting different people. When we went to Kisstory, I did not get home until 3am! That is really late! I would be gutted if this project ended. We have had so much fun going out with friends at **Share**, other than this what is there



GADA members and volunteers
getting festive at Hyde Park's
Winter Wonderland

Peter

"I like football. I want to see England play at Wembley. I would be very sad if the project ended."

Doris

*"I like the people at **Share**, they are nice people. Very friendly. They look after you. I have been to a disco and Winter Wonderland. That was really good. They are very good at looking after me, if I have a fit. If the project finished I would be very upset."*

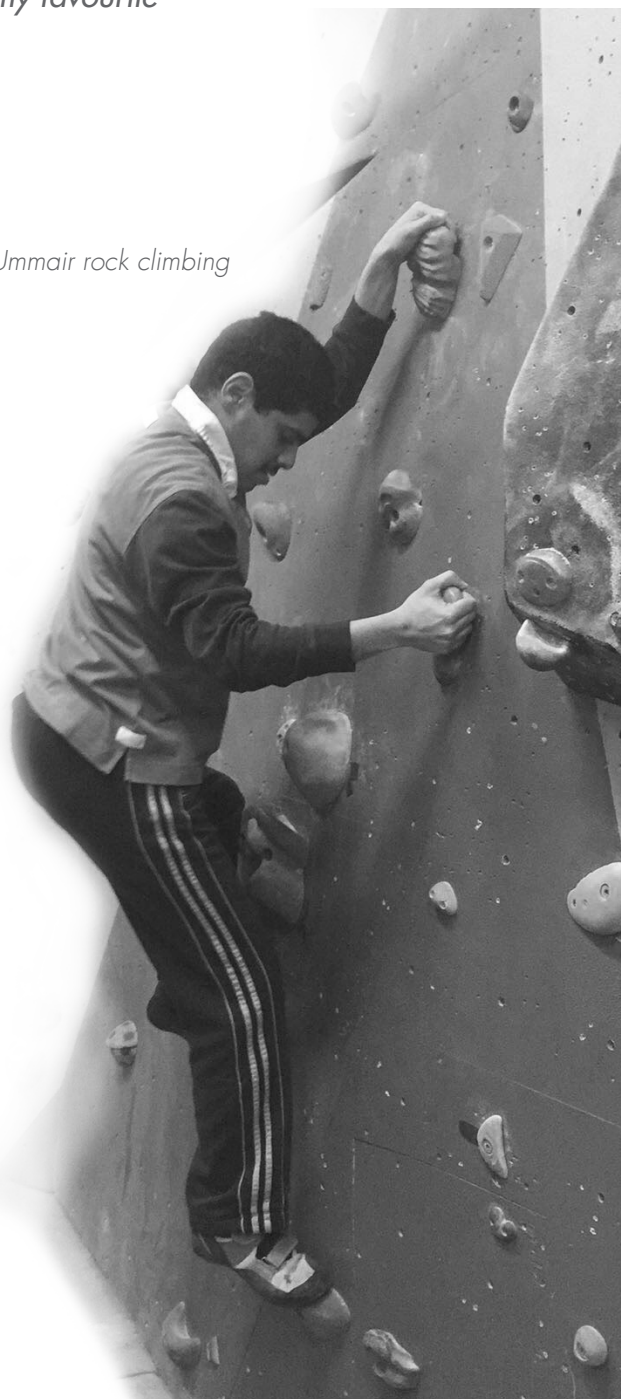
Ummair

"I like watching cricket on TV but I prefer to watch it in real life. I feel happy when I am watching a cricket match, it is my favourite sport. I am doing something soon that I have never done before, rock climbing. I am happy to try something new. I am also going to do crazy golf. I definitely want to try that!"

Ummair rock climbing

Philippa

*"The project has been really fun and enjoyable for everyone. I have had so much fun on every trip that I have been on. I have met some great people and made some lovely friends. There is nothing I do not like about the **GADA** project. If the project ended, then I would miss all the amazing Social Buddies who have made me feel extremely welcome. I would also miss all of my friends who help to make the trips unforgettable, we have had some amazing times!"*



5.2 Social Buddies

Michael

*"I am a Social Buddy. I have been doing this for about 2 years. I became one because I saw all the trips that the students were going on and I thought, I want to do that. It is good to see the students outside **Share** having fun, and not worrying about getting back home on time, along with seeing them behaving differently.*

*When the project first started, the idea was an interesting one. Every three months the students signed up for trips and they kept saying how good they were. There is a lot of interest. The students are always putting ideas forward in the steering group. There is a lot of fresh ones, no matter how silly the ideas are. The **GADA** coordinators will take a look, and let them know. They don't shoot their ideas down in flames. It really is a fantastic project, I really do hope it gets funding again.*

The trips are very well organised. All of the Social Buddies who sign up get member profiles, along with a risk assessment of the venue. The member profile is really handy as it explains which members do not get on, and we can then organise them into groups, and that helps to reduce the stress levels. I can only think of 2 students where this has happened, otherwise everyone gets along.

If the project can continue in the same format, offering a wide variety of trips, that would work well. It has been a roaring success, the students absolutely love it, they are always talking about it. At the end of each trip the students are as smiley, and excited as they are at the start."

Social Buddy Michael and member Haroon on their way to Brooklands Museum



Paul

"I am a Social Buddy, because I saw at the time that most of the students didn't get out. If they don't get out, they will just sit at home indoors with their mum and dads. They don't really have a social life. So, I volunteered. I enjoy the social aspect; the people are very friendly and nice to be with.

The project is really good because it helps people to get out and about and be independent. They grow in confidence. If the project stopped then they will all be staying indoors at home with their parents. They are adults, and they need to be able to go out without their parents.

If we got funding, I would like to see us go a bit further out of London, maybe organise overnight trips."

*GADA members and volunteers at
Comic Con in the Excel Centre*



Alix

"I was new to London and I wanted to find a way to meet people, explore the city, as well as giving back to my new community. Volunteering for Share has without a doubt met my expectations, and in many ways, has exceeded my expectations.

I wasn't sure what to expect from Share, having never done anything like this before, but the training was done really well, so I didn't feel nervous on my first trip. I have gained a new appreciation for life, and for being lucky enough to be completely independent. It has taught me not to take my independence for granted. I have met so many amazing people through Go Anywhere Do Anything, I truly feel that my life is better for being involved. The staff & students are so friendly, it makes going on each trip such a fun experience. I like being able to show students what London has to offer and experiencing new things with them.

Get involved- you won't regret it for a second!"

Joanne, Alix, Doddy, Joyce and Anand at London's Cat Café in Shoreditch



Karen

"My time with Share is really quite amazing. I have met some beautiful people who make each trip brilliant. There is a wonderful caring atmosphere and after each trip I am left buzzing from spending time with some incredible people, doing some great things. I really look forward to every trip and have loved forming relationships with everybody involved. (I love it so much that I feel like I have had a very selfish volunteering experience so far!)."

***Go Anywhere, Do Anything** has an incredibly positive impact on its members. I have buddied up with some members multiple times and I can see how they have changed and become more confident and talkative as time has gone on – it is great to see more and more personalities emerging over time. To have the opportunity to be yourself, laugh and be happy in a non-judgemental, caring and supportive environment can only have a positive impact. The environment of **Go Anywhere, Do Anything**, allows members to accomplish new things, form friendships and be more independent, while managing fears or apprehension that may arise in doing those things. What could be better for anyone's wellbeing than spending time with people who want to share new experiences with you and have fun doing so?!"*

John, Donna, Georgina and Karen having a much needed rest at Chessington World of Adventures



5.3 Feedback from parents/carers

Mansoor's father

*"This project has been very good for Mansoor, they have been to so many places. I know in school they did trips but this is different, it has helped to build his confidence. Having a different routine and change is good. Mansoor needs someone to go with him, he cannot do it on his own. I have seen Mansoor grow in confidence, he talks more now. If the project did not continue then the family would be very disappointed for Mansoor, he does not have much of a routine at home and often goes to **Share**. This project is a lifeline for him because he can rely on other people who are not family members and he gets to see different things which makes him more independent."*

Minal – Harish's carer

*"The **GADA** project has been fantastic, they have been to so many different places, some of which I have never heard of. I have seen Harish grow in confidence, the day before the trips, he is really excited and happy. I was a bit concerned initially about the evening events, but Leanne and Joe have reassured us. I would like to see family members to take part in some way in the future, for example if there was a weekend away."*

GADA members and volunteers enjoying a tour of the Houses of Parliament



Ummair's mum

*"The project is absolutely wonderful. Ummair has been out to so many different places, his confidence has grown. He has met so many different people, and made lots of new friends. He is now more confident in travelling independently. He is proud to tell me that he is going out with his friends. In the past, he would have been stuck at home. He is much more independent. I would like to see the trips expand to 2/3 days including an overnight stay. That would be really good and make Ummair feel grown up. I think since the **GADA** project has started Ummair talks and converses more, and he engages better with his peers and friends. I really do hope that **Share** do get continued funding for **GADA**."*

Carol – Kellie's carer

*"The **GADA** project has been great for Kellie, she goes out so much more. It has empowered her, given her pride in herself and her self-esteem has improved so much.*

*She is happy to take the lead role in projects, she is very enthusiastic and proud about her role in the project. When she goes to meetings she feels that her input is valued. The **GADA** project is fantastic, there has been a wide range of events from seeing a band, going to a disco, watching a show or experiencing rock climbing. I think it has been planned incredibly well, it needs to continue!"*



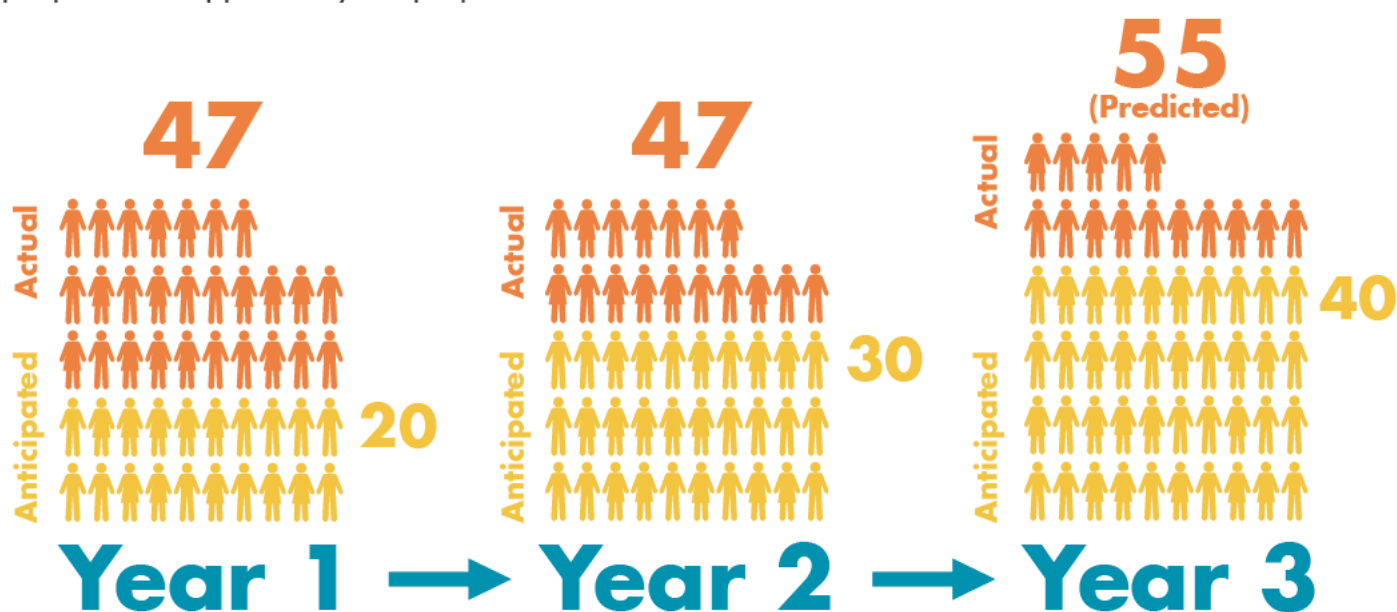
*GADA members and
volunteers visiting the zoo*

6 Outcomes

Please note that all of the data presented in this section for year 3 is provisional. The final figures will be provided in the year 3 end of the year report.

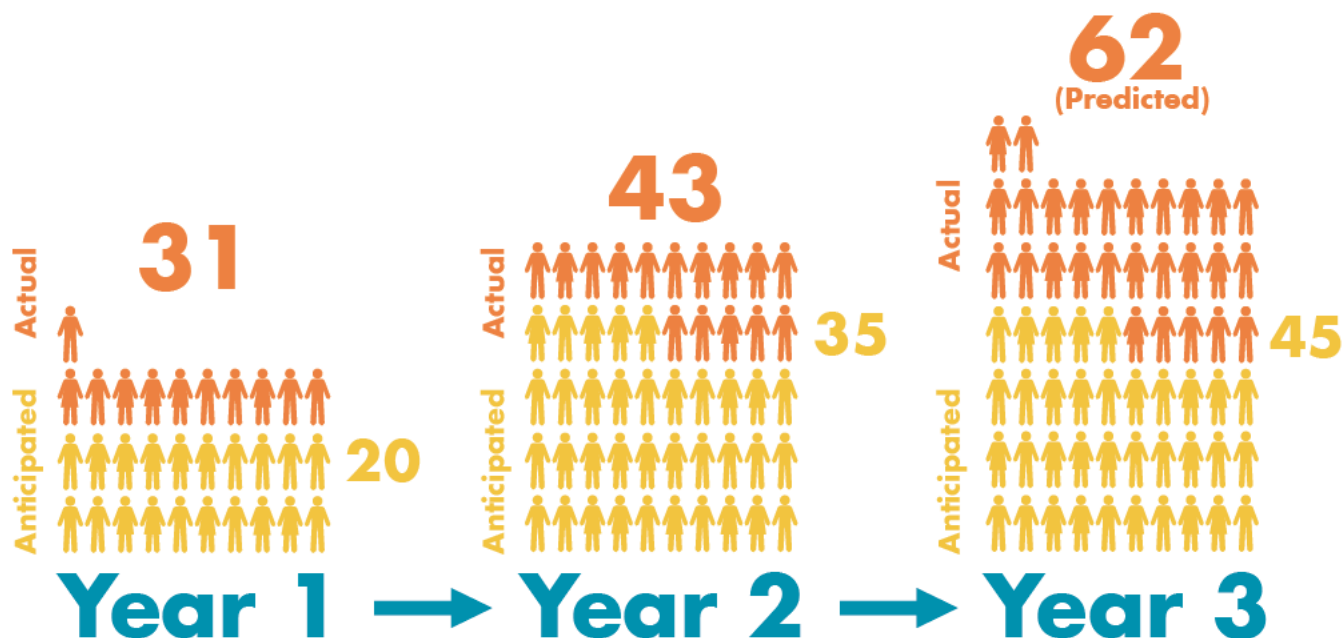
20 people with learning disabilities will be involved in the first year, rising to 40 by year 3.

47 people were involved in the first year, 47 in year 2 and 55 by year 3. Over the three years, 70 people were supported by the project.



There will be a minimum of 20 activities in the first year, rising to 35 in year 2 and 45 in year 3.

31 activities were run in the first year, 43 in year 2 and 62 in year 3. In total, 136 trips were organised over the whole project. 36 more activities were run than anticipated, exceeding the original target.



People with learning difficulties are more confident in accessing mainstream arts, sports and leisure events. They're able to manage social situations, navigate the transport system, and take part on an equal basis.

In year 1, 20 members said that they felt 100% more confident in accessing, arts sports and leisure activities. In year 2, 30 members stated that they felt 100% more confident in accessing arts, sport and leisure activities..



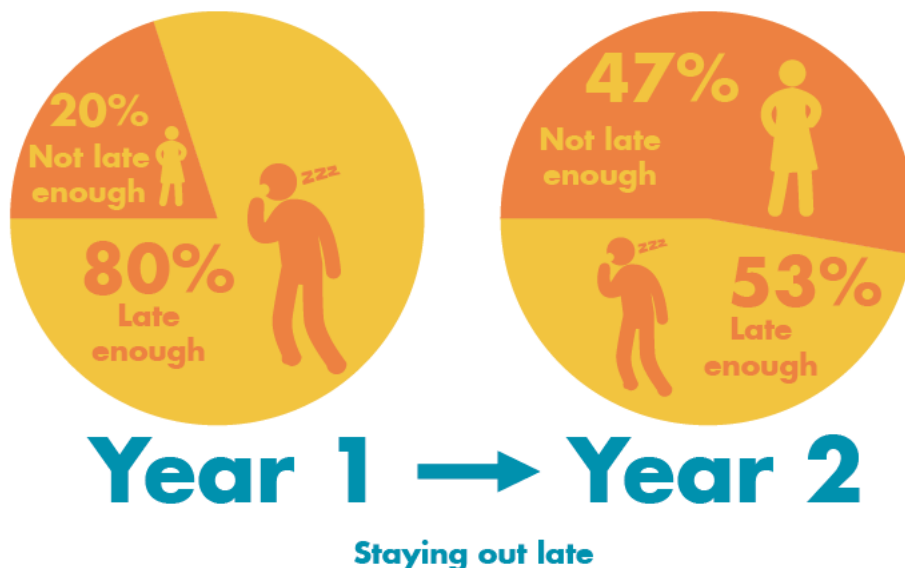
Of the 47 members that got involved, the **GADA** team surveyed 20 of the most frequent users of the project in year 1. In year 2 they again surveyed 30 of the most frequent users to find out how they felt about the project. Although the other members were not surveyed formally, the **GADA** team would regularly seek verbal feedback from them on how they enjoyed trips.

The project saw a high proportion of members reporting improved confidence and an increase in participation. This successful outcome can be attributed to the approach taken with members, the support offered by the **GADA** team along with the volunteers who carried out the role of Social Buddies. Furthermore, it has improved member's confidence, this is because they are in a specialist setting and sharing experiences. This in turn leads to people with learning disabilities develop better strategies for dealing with everyday life.

The feedback obtained by the evaluator frequently highlighted the value placed on the **GADA** strength, this was a project in a space where people with learning disabilities felt safe and could grow in confidence.

People with learning disabilities lead normal lives, enjoying social activities at the same times and venues as everyone else, and with the lack of constraints such as getting home early.

All the activities took place over the evenings, and the weekends. In year 1, 16 people were staying out as late as they wanted to at night time. 4 wanted to stay out later, planning for this was built into year 2. 47 people enjoyed weekend and out of hours activities.



In year 2, 53% of the members felt that they stayed out late enough. During the project 2nd year, members had a better understanding of what it meant to be able to stay out late, and how to lead a more fulfilling social life. This was because they had a better support system in place to enable them to do this.

Some of the members still did not come out as much as they'd like to. This is often due to resistance from family. More work and building in capacity to deliver specialised support is crucial, to support family members who may be fearful or worried about the person that they support being out and about.

People with learning difficulties report feeling fitter and happier as a result of their activities on the project. Where appropriate people's health can be demonstrated to have improved. E.g. those seeking to lose weight.

In year 1, 19 people identified health and wellbeing goals. 20 people reported improvements in 2 or more aspects of life. These improvements include; feeling happier, safer, more independent and less lonely. In year 2, 30 people set themselves health and wellbeing goals to achieve over the year. From the previous year 67% reported that they had met their goal.

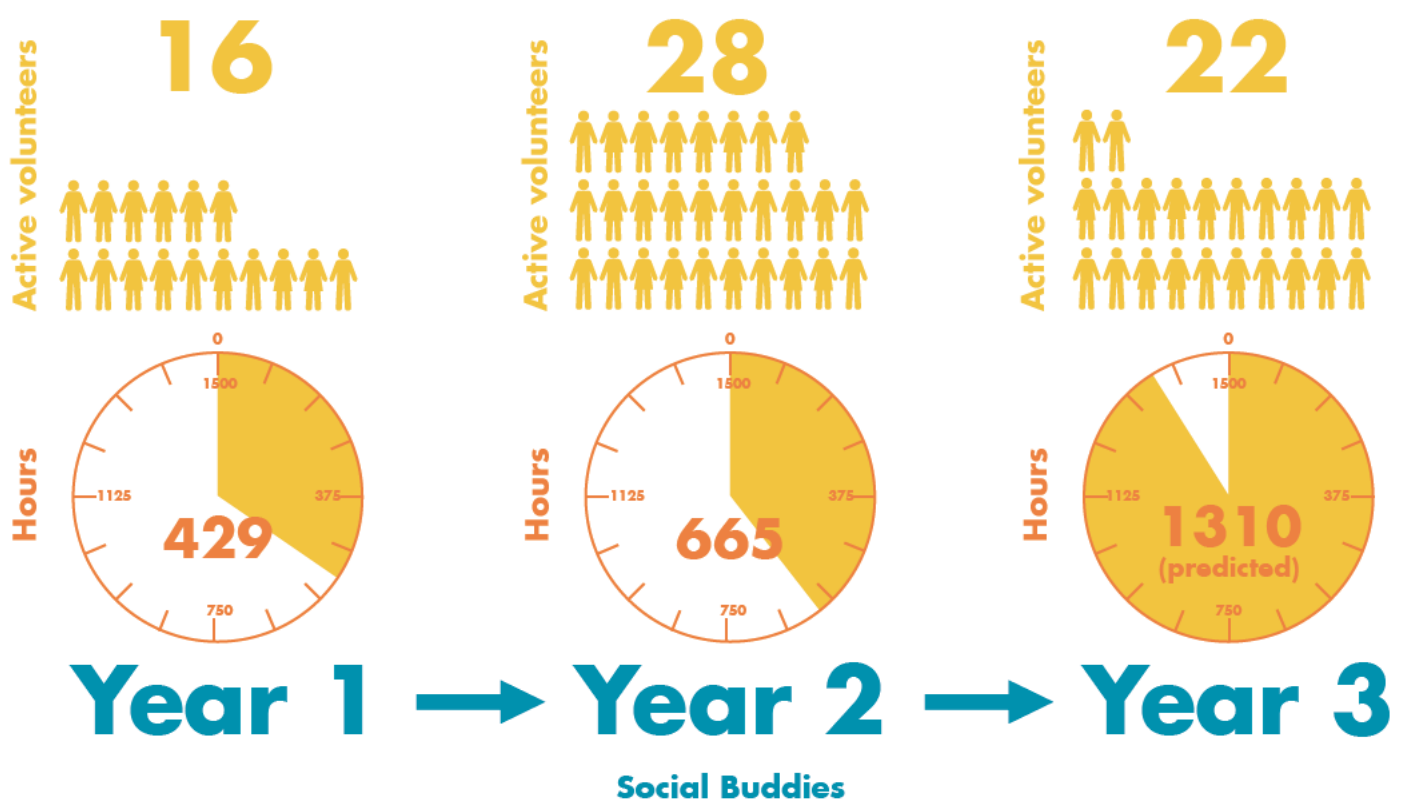
Physical activity has brought members together, and made them more active, helped to improve their mental wellbeing as well as enhancing self-esteem. Previously, they would frequently sit and watch TV, or stay at home at in the evenings and the weekends. The result is that this supports people with learning disabilities in taking better care of themselves.

People with learning difficulties are able to follow and develop their interests through buddy relationships with others, who share similar interests. As a result, they feel valued and benefit from companionship.

In year 1, 20 people reported improved confidence, particularly with regard to accessing the community. By the end of year 2, more than 600 volunteer hours were clocked up, in supporting the members, an increase of 160 hours from the previous year.

Providing activities where members could interact with other people, including making new friends allowed for improved learning amongst peers with similar backgrounds.

The number of volunteers in year 3 are lower, due to volunteers leaving the project. However, the **GADA** project did not recruit any new volunteers. This was because they were able to utilise the existing volunteers, who were able to commit more hours. In total 34 Social Buddies have been recruited during the lifetime of the project.



The learning from this project will help other projects around the country and result in more people with learning disabilities leading independent and inclusive lives.

Members found strategies to engage the whole community in the discussions about where to go and what to do. They undertook surveys and used Talking Mats (a communication tool) to structure their meetings.

There are some important lessons about running user-led initiatives for this client group, some ideas that could benefit similar projects are:

- Employing someone with a learning disability to work on the project.
- Enabling service-users to contribute to the monitoring guidelines to reflect the outcomes that they value.
- Training service users so that they can deliver induction to volunteers and new staff.

The project far exceeded the original targets set, with the budget set. The team did not anticipate this success, and this high level of participation demonstrates clear evidence for the need for such a project to continue to be run, and replicated across the sector.

7 Conclusion

- The **GADA** project has a valuable role to play in **changing people's attitudes** and how society views people who have a learning disability, offering opportunities for members to exercise meaningful choice.
- Social contact takes different forms. For some members, it was just to achieve some level of independence through their involvement with the project, **improving their quality of life**. Simply developing the confidence to leave the confines of the home, travel independently was a major achievement. This improved their understanding of everyday life skills, reduced their isolation, and **enhanced their wellbeing**.
- Opportunities for people with learning disabilities to come together in a **structured and supportive environment** are rare. Providing a safe setting where members could interact with other people, including making new friends allows for improved learning amongst their peers. Co-ordinating activities in groups and developing a buddy system of volunteers who share similar interests has enabled support in building members' **confidence** in being part of the community.
- The **GADA** project has **embedded itself into local community networks**, through volunteer matching. This provides an excellent model of service provision, as it is sustainable, cost effective and responsive to the changing needs of the community.
- Engaging with members was a crucial part of shaping the delivery of the **GADA** project. For several members building their social network and 'making a friend' was something that had made a significant impact on their lives. The visits carried out were not just a **learning opportunity** for members but also provided **social and cultural benefits** and allowed them to **engage with their community**. In doing so, they improved their own social and peer network.
- Activities took place in the evenings and at the weekends, which meant that people with learning disabilities could **enjoy social activities at the same time as everyone else**. There were no constraints on getting home at a certain time, they could stay out as late as they wanted to. This has enabled members to make **life choices** - enjoying a lifestyle that for most of the population is accepted as normal.
- The project's success would not have been possible without added input from members, who took on **leadership roles**. Several members were able to develop their leadership skills through participating in the meetings and volunteering at events as a Social Buddy. In addition, Social Buddies organised more trips so that members did not miss out if the trips were oversubscribed. Further ideas from members for the project's next stage should funding be obtained, include planning overnight stays.

- **GADA** has revolutionised the way **Share** engages with the people that they support. As a **user led** project there an emphasis on a flexible, responsive and committed approach to partnership working with stakeholders. The organisation has led the way in producing easy read documentation, which has now been implemented across the whole of **Share**.
- This project also enables **social inclusion** and **integration**, effectively bringing those with learning disabilities together with those who don't have them, through **shared interests**. It demonstrates and showcases that people with learning disabilities can enjoy mainstream activities along with everyone else. Furthermore, it has improved members' confidence, because they are sharing experiences. This enables people with learning disabilities develop better **resilience and strategies for dealing with everyday life**.
- A positive change has been members being able to access places of interest or things the members might like to do with friends they have made, but would not normally see outside **Share**. Most venues and organisations had an excellent attitude towards **inclusivity**. For others, the project has challenged how venues and organisations cater for this audience. Furthermore, the project received lots of support in the form of carer and disability discounts on entrance fees. This has really benefited many of whom are on a low income.
- As well as having fun, members have developed **social skills**, improved their independent travel and living skills. This is because they are more aware of how to manage everyday transactions and negotiate London's transport network. Interest has developed through the project. Members can now **converse more widely** about a range of subjects and experiences.
- There has been an increase in the number of members that own a mobile phone, since they have begun to socialise without family, this is helpful in helping them to stay safe and well as ensuring that they develop their **communication skills**. As a result, they are now **more confident in using their own initiative** in arranging future trips.
- Parents and carers felt reassured that their sons and daughters were safe as they were accompanied by Social Buddies; this enabled them to see them as adults rather than dependent children. Initially there was some resistance from families who were fearful or worried about the person they supported, being out and about. Over time the project has managed to build trust and form relationships with members and their carers. This has led to several people having more **independent living skills and experiences** in the community.
- **Peer support** was offered during steering group meetings to ensure that members wishes and preferences were acknowledged, along with enabling members to make choices whilst on a trip. **Self-advocacy** was offered to those who were not able to join trips. When appropriate, Share worked in partnership with health and social care services to ensure that members needs were met.

- The **GADA** project observed reduced social isolation. Specific examples given by members include; making new friends, being able to get out of the house, and having something to look forward to.
- Making changes in attitudes towards leisure has helped to pave the way for people with learning disabilities moving into more **independent living situations**. This is something that will be inevitable for several members, particularly for those whose parents are getting older and more frail.

8 The next steps

The project has had a valuable and important role to play in changing people's attitudes towards the way people view people with learning disabilities. There will always be a demand for projects like **GADA**.

This report considers the learning journey **Share** has been on during this project, along with feedback from members, parents, carers and Social Buddies. There is immense support to take the **GADA** project to the next stage.

In addition, **Share** has developed a robust project model that can be franchised out to other local community groups, providing quality and value for money services for people who have learning disabilities.

The organisation is very keen to continue and grow this project further, to provide more opportunities for adults with learning disabilities, not only internally within Share, but externally across the sector.

Share would like to:

- Reach the harder to reach people and those that are very isolated.
- Run trips further afield, either outside of London or outside of the UK.
- Recruit more volunteers so we can run even more trips.
- Develop user led social media presence.
- Offer 'mystery shopper' type feedback to the venues we visit.

Further funding would enable **Share** to realise and achieve this.

Appendix

Feedback from year 1

Members

- I like having a chance to go out more often, my confidence has grown and I don't feel scared anymore.
- I have made new friends.
- It's nice to be able to talk to new people.
- It's fun, way better than being bored at home.
- I get to spend more time with my friends, I have a lot of fun and laugh more.
- I have got better at finding my way around London"
- I feel happier – I get to go to fun places and talk to lovely people.
- **Go Anywhere, Do Anything** gives me something to look forward to.
- I'm really glad I've discovered the project as it means I can get out more.
- I enjoyed seeing all the different plants at Kew Gardens, it was nice to walk around and see new things.
- The Social Buddies were really nice and they made me happy.
- I liked going to the Southbank, there were new and interesting people there.

Social Buddies

- The best part of these events is getting to know the members and it's always nice to see some of the same faces at each event.
- I can see this project really growing with many more volunteers and perhaps more members signing on. I hope it will continue to encourage new friendships and support networks.
- It was a real pleasure to spend the day with such nice people, in such a lovely place.
- This whole project can be so empowering and potentially life changing for people.
- I hope the members are enjoying this programme because I definitely love being able to assist and help out, and I've found that I come home feeling really happy with a renewed appreciation for life in general.
- **Go Anywhere, Do Anything** is a fantastic initiative which I'm so happy to be a part of.
- I believe overall the project seems to be running very well and is led in a great way by passionate staff always willing to answer any questions.

Feedback from year 2

Members

- My life has got better.
- My life feels different, I'm meeting lots of new people.
- I like to keep myself busy and like to hang out with friends.
- Staying indoors is rubbish!
- I like driving my wheelchair around.
- I'm on top of the world.
- I've got new friends.
- It's nice to treat myself.
- My life is more fun.
- I have got to meet new people.
- I am able to do more.
- I have got to do things I wouldn't normally do.
- I have been able to watch sports I like.
- I have been able to see and do new things.
- I have a different experience than I'm used to.
- I am smiling and giggling more.
- I'm more independent.
- I liked going out to the nightclub, let's do it more.
- I get to go out more; being stuck at home staring at the wall does my head in!
- I feel more independent.
- I know how to go to new places once I go once.
- I'm gaining confidence.
- I got myself a diary to put trip dates in.
- I feel wonderful.
- I know how to get along with many more people and go places.
- Once I've been somewhere once, I know how to go again.
- It's lovely, it makes me feel good.

Social Buddies

- It's such a good day out with amazing people... Afterwards I'm left feeling on top of the world! The chats I have with **Share** members are great, and every trip I have been on has been buzzing with happiness and positivity.
- Getting to know new people, helping out in the community, exploring London, being involved with a team & feeling valued.
- I absolutely love it - so much so, I will chat about the trips to anyone who will listen afterwards!

- I think it is run brilliantly. I'm always telling people how enthusiastic and attentive the **GADA** staff are!
- There is so much information and ways to give feedback. Superbly efficient and great ideas too.
- I've enjoyed getting to know new people, helping out in the community, exploring London, being involved with a team & feeling valued.

