

Hello, we are The Velcro Collective. A Cirencester based performance company.

We are connecting and building relationships with visually impaired children and their families (aged between 5 – 12yrs old and in the Gloucestershire area), to share experiences, learn together and to take part in some outdoor participatory workshops in 2022.

In Spring 2022, five families joined us at Westonbirt Arboretum for a magical creative experience outdoors. Exploring interactive participation and performance, the families were invited to join us and co-create in a new creative, kinaesthetic, and sensory way.



We found forest treasures, created a suspended mobile in the trees and witnessed it come to life through movement, created animal shelters, took part in mindful listening, and made soundscapes and moving artworks.

Interwoven with audio description throughout, the experience was co-designed and co-delivered with Visually Impaired dance artist and facilitator, Holly Thomas.

We are inviting more families to join us for our next event on **Saturday 23rd July.**





Background

For the past 3 years we have been working with Holly to create inclusive outdoor experiences in nature for visually impaired and sighted children and their families. Holly's lived experience has been the fundamental starting point when we have been creatively exploring the best way to describe dance performance for visually impaired audiences. Holly has worked as a lecturer in performing arts for the RNIB and has taught dance to visually impaired adults and young people. She is also a member of the Bristol Sight Loss Council, Arts and Leisure sub-group.

More broadly, our company and our work have over 25 years in working with inclusive groups from children and young people to adults, disabled people, people with mental health conditions and people with complex needs.

The workshops

Our workshops are unique and involve individual and group creative sensory tasks, noticing how we interact with and relate to the natural world. We work with natural materials and descriptive imagery, moving, writing, drawing, building, and making together. Out of this becomes movement and auditory physical invitations which we gently explore together. The workshops aim to develop our interconnectedness with the environment, ourselves, and those around us.

The outcomes of the workshops are to:

- Provide visually impaired children and their families with a creative, participatory opportunity.



- Enhance wellbeing, social skills, confidence, self-esteem and family cohesion.
- Reduce social isolation and build a peer network with other families in the local area.
- Provide the opportunity to connect with the natural environment.
- Support us to develop our understanding of how children and young people would like audio description provided, and to use this learning in the creation of performance work

We will do this by offering:

- An initial conversation to discuss the project in more detail with interested families.
- A workshop day Saturday 23rd July 2022
- An opportunity to get involved further by joining us on our creative steering group, to help us make our work even better!



What to expect

Families will:

- Take part in a series of fun sensory based creative activities in the outdoors altogether as a family.
- Be supported to connect with different senses from being in the natural environment as a starting point for creative inspiration. For example, finding & collecting things in the woods, listening to the environmental sounds around us, creating music with natural materials.



- Be encouraged to actively participate in a range of creative activities drawing, building / crafting / making, moving, writing.
- Actively create their own ideas and be supported to try new things out with the group.

Children taking part will be invited to:

- Contribute to the ideas and be interested in exploring these creatively with us.
- Communicate what works / doesn't work for them creatively as a visually impaired participant.
- Interact and engage with the other children taking part.
- Make informed creative choices independently, within their families and the whole group.
- Communicate verbally/through other mechanisms which means their personal voice is heard.

Recent feedback from VI families

"It was great to stop and just focus on spending time together."

"The audio description made the performance come to life more for her (child) but as a dyslexic adult it did the same for me too."



"She has had very limited contact with others who are visually impaired, so this event really reassured her that she isn't the only one!"

"It was a very happy, relaxed day and a lovely opportunity meet other VI families in a pressure free setting."

Venue

- Westonbirt Arboretum, Tetbury, GL8 8QS.
- A travel bursary is available upon request.
- We will be working outdoors for most of the time. A wet weather plan will be in place.
- Further information about getting to the Westonbirt site for the project will be sent out to confirmed families.

How to get involved

If you and your family are interested, we would love to hear from you and talk more about it! Contact me, Louise, by phone on 07876 773775 or by email at thevelcrocollective@gmail.com

For more information, you can [visit our website](#) or listen to an audio recording about the project [here](#).

We look forward to hearing from you!

