

**David Lammy, Minister for Culture**  
**Speech at the launch of the See a Voice Project**  
**16<sup>th</sup> January 2007**

"Thank you Ken for welcoming us and I am delighted to have been invited here today. See a Voice is not only an inspired idea, but a truly admirable example of the real benefits that can be achieved when organisations work closely together.

Like so many successful ventures, the concept behind See a Voice is simple. To increase access by sharing resources and knowledge. A simple idea, yet one that provides the key to unlock the door for new audiences across the country to live performances. It will provide both the opportunity to attend for the first-time, and a greater choice for those who already enjoy assisted performances.

I am very proud of the association the government has had with this project. The Invest to Save programme, run by the Treasury encourages new and joined-up ways of working by funding projects that develop innovative ideas, bringing together organisations to deliver more efficient and effective public services.

The arts and culture strand of projects look to test and develop new ways of delivering cultural services and new opportunities for more people to take part in cultural activities. Showing how organisations in the cultural sectors can work with each other and with others in the public, private and voluntary sectors to improve people's access to culture and demonstrate how cultural activity can make an important contribution to education, health, economic development and social cohesion.

DCMS aims to make the arts accessible for everyone and to increase the numbers of people who attend and participate in arts activities. One of the ways to achieve this is by improving access to events for people with a disability. In doing this we have to consider how we remove any barrier a person has to enjoying the arts. See a Voice does just this, and I am eager to see the progress of the project and the changes that it brings about.

The Disability Discrimination Act was introduced in 1995 and has transformed the landscape for many people. This was an important step in making arts organisations accessible but we must continue to work to remove the barriers so we can provide a full service.

The Arts Council has recently published their Disability Equality Scheme which is another welcome step towards achieving this. There has been progress so far in extending this opportunity, but there is still more that could be done. To keep focused on this area, we need to remind ourselves why it is so important.

Theatre-going is a popular activity with shows nationwide selling out. And no wonder – across the country, there is an amazing variety of intelligent, thought

provoking and entertaining productions, whether they be big West End hits or studio performances of new writing. The Evening Standard Theatre Awards, which I recently attended, proved this in abundance. It is an art form I truly enjoy when I get the opportunity.

Theatre is a collaborative art form used around the world and throughout time to communicate ideas, to perform for each other and entertain, to teach lessons, and to tell wonderful stories. I recently attended a performance of Frost/Nixon and was completely absorbed by the play. You can understand the importance of giving everyone who wants to see a production the opportunity to do so when you attend a performance that moves you.

The arts and theatre in particular, reflect, develop and symbolise all the different aspects of society and therefore should be inclusive of all corners of society at its end. This inclusivity is the goal that we should be striving for.

This project could benefit a large number of people. But the numbers don't tell the whole story. The impact on an individual who is enabled to enjoy the magic of the theatre in a way that they could not before can be huge. And that in turn will impact on that person's family, friends – the whole community benefits.

I'd like to congratulate the See a Voice team on their work so far and very much look forward to seeing how the project develops, I wish the team every success."