

Project report for ‘Awakening Senses’

A collaborative project by the Sensory Trust, Eden project and the Devon & Cornwall Constabulary.

Supported by the Cornwall Children’s Fund.



November 2005



eden project



Context

This report is the result of the 'Awakening Senses project', a day event of user consultation at the Eden project. The Sensory Trust planned this collaborative project with the Devon & Cornwall Constabulary (referred to in this report as D&C Constabulary) to invite local school children with various disabilities and impairments to share their opinions on the Eden project.

The day was also an opportunity for the D&C Constabulary to deliver their plans to work with children from their inclusion programme as part of the CSV (Community Service Volunteers) 'Making a difference day'.

As an organisation that works to ensure that all people can enjoy outdoor environments, the Sensory Trust promotes the involvement of disabled people as a valuable way of finding out how a site is working for different audiences. In our experience, disabled people are often not asked for their opinions and can sometimes feel as a result that their opinion has no value.

The day was intended to find out what the children felt about Eden Project, and particular to identify what they felt were the most special qualities. It was not designed as an audit, although it did reveal useful insights of barriers preventing some of the children from accessing certain experiences.

The children involved came from schools in the local area, some had visited Eden before and some had not. They were all very enthusiastic and the day went extremely well and we hope to repeat the process in the future.

This report will be published on the Internet to share the approach and findings with others thinking of running consultation. We hope this will also encourage others to run similar days and we look forward to reading future reports of consultation work at other sites.

The project was able to go ahead due to a successful funding application to the Cornwall Children's Fund, which allowed us to run the day and cover the costs of materials, transport, and food and staff time. We are very grateful for this support.

The day was a really positive event, we look forward to doing it again and the effect it will have for all future visitors to the Eden project regardless of age, disability and background.

This report is written in two sections:

An outline of the day, why it was important, who was involved and what techniques were used

Reflections from the work - what this work means, how such days are organised and the benefits they bring. These are outcomes that have been learnt through this and previous consultation work carried out by the Sensory Trust.

Background

Sensory Trust

The Sensory Trust works to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to experience, learn from and actively participate in the natural environment, regardless of age or disability. We disseminate information, highlight examples of good practice, publicise projects that are exploring new approaches, carry out research and provide advice to people planning projects.

The Sensory Trust advocates a broad-based approach to accessible site design and bases its approach on the following assumptions:

Integration, not segregation. Disabled people share the same needs, interests and aspirations as anyone else. Segregated provision serves to reinforce feelings of difference and 'deviance from the norm' while inclusive design benefits the widest possible spectrum of society.

Working with, not for, people. Too often facilities and designs have been developed on the assumed preferences and needs of elderly and disabled people. Involvement of elderly and disabled people in site planning and development is essential in avoiding costly mistakes and maximising the success of landscape design.

The right to choose. It is important that disabled people are sufficiently well-informed about what is on offer if they are to be able to make their own choices. This should not be limited to sites that are regarded as fully accessible – sites that contain features that are barriers to some people will be accessible to others. Sufficient information is crucial.

Motivating by example. Good practice is more successfully encouraged by highlighting examples of success and illustrating the possibilities. Practitioners

benefit from seeing examples of positive design and solutions to common challenges.

Access for all people. This is a fundamental part of the Sensory Trust's mission.

www.sensorytrust.org.uk

This project was a chance for the Sensory Trust to carry out consultation at a project where the team is actively involved with inclusive design work. It is valuable to consult with different user groups, especially ones who do not often get the opportunity to share their views. Children are often overlooked as a user group, whether in the provision of a specific experience for an individual child or a child in a group situation. As a result they are often given what an adult presumes they would like. Working collaboratively with other organisations always opens up more view points and sides to each story, and this was also beneficial to this project.

Eden project

The Eden Project was established as one of the landmark Millennium projects in the UK to mark the year 2000 and is structured as an educational charitable trust.

The Eden Project communicates its story in a 'Living Theatre of Plants and People' based in a large crater in which nestle two vast greenhouses (Biomes). These house plants, crops and landscapes from the humid tropics and warm temperate regions and act as a backdrop to the temperate landscape, called the Outdoor Biome. Eden uses exhibitions, art, storytelling, workshops, lectures and events to put messages across to both the public and formal education groups. The underlying concept presents to the widest possible public audience the need for environmental care through a celebration of what nature gives to us. Eden is demonstrating behavioural change on site, holding a mirror to our values and civilisation and encouraging respect for the things that sustain us.

www.edenproject.com

The Eden project feels strongly about creating the best provision for all its visitors, including children. It has learnt the value of working collaboratively and the benefit of consultation with users especially those with more specific needs. It was keen to be part of this project to support its evaluation programme to understand current

success or shortfalls of existing exhibits and interpretation, to inform future design and management decisions.

Devon & Cornwall Constabulary

Youth Intervention Officers

The Devon & Cornwall Constabulary has had dedicated Youth Officers since its instigation in 1967, when officers were dedicated to Schools work. Following the governments paper 'Every Child Matters', the force re-structured its working practises, and developed the role of Youth Intervention Officers. These officers, work within their local government areas, and are dedicated to the 'Every Child matters' strategy (ECM).

In Cornwall, there are six Officers, working in North Cornwall, Caradon, Restormel, Carrick, Kerrier and Penwith Council areas. Their remit is to work with young people alongside the ECM guidelines, to ensure that all avenues, information, services and opportunities are accessible to all. In working practise, this takes into account some of the following factors: Age, Size, Parental Support, Abilities, Disabilities, and Impairments, Learning capabilities, geographic location, financial support, criminal activity, domestic abuse, behaviour traits and various other local issues.

www.policiesite.tk/

The Youth Intervention Officers were keen to be involved in this project as part of CSV day, a day that allows young people to give something back by volunteering their time as a contribution to make a difference. The Officers had previously worked with the children involved and knew they would be happy to give their opinions as they are not always seen as people with something of value to offer.

Community Service Volunteers

Community Service Volunteers (CSV) is distinctive because of the strength of its work in citizen involvement, volunteering and learning, and close working relationship with statutory, public, private and voluntary bodies.

CSV has a proven track record in meeting social need, and establishing new responses to evolving social challenges in the UK and at a European level. It works in partnership with the mass media to mobilise people to participate in their local community. CSV accesses, retains and shares learning within and outside the

organisation. It promotes and delivers an agenda of inclusion and active citizenship, and contributes to civil renewal.

Participants

The children were invited to share their views because of their age and their experience of living with a disability. The group included a range of ages from 8-13, a good gender balance and a range of impairments including permanent and temporary wheelchair users, hearing and visual impairments, learning difficulties, growth deficiencies and mobility impairments.

Leaders

The following people helped plan and run the day:

Lynsey Robinson, Wendy Brewin and Clare Thompson, Chris Stoneham, Sensory Trust

PC David Thompson and PC Dave Buckland, D & C Constabulary

Teaching Assistants from Biscovey Junior School, Brannel School, Poltair School, Penrice Language School, Cornwall

Outline of the day



The group gathered in the street at the Eden Project's visitor centre to meet each other and to receive a brief introduction to the day. The children were divided into smaller groups, talked through the activities for the day and given an explanation on using the Widgit emotions. From there, the groups headed for the viewing platform (stop 1) outside the visitor centre, across to Wild Cornwall exhibit (stop 2) down through the outside biome and into the link building. The groups then split and half of them went to the Humid Tropic Biome (HTB) and the other half into the Warm Temperate Biome (WTB). The groups then swapped over so nobody missed anything. The groups then continued to the new education building the Core for lunch before taking part in feedback discussion and of course a group photograph. At the end of the session PC Thompson and PC Buckland handed out certificates and T-Shirts rewarding everyone for their involvement in the CSV 'Making a difference day'.

Techniques

- Prompt questions
- Disposable cameras
- Widgit emotions
- Discussion on the move
- Feedback discussion
- Observation
- Reflective discussion

Prompt Questions



Each group was given a sheet with questions on to carry around with them, it had two sets of questions; specific questions to be answered on arrival at the viewing platform, and a set of prompt questions to be used (if needed) to provoke discussion at each of the stops.

The specific questions were:

What do you think Eden is here for?

Do you think Eden has anything for children?

What is your first impression at the viewing platform? Choose one word which 'says it all'.

The prompt questions were:

A. What are the positive things in this area? And are they

O.K

Good, or

Great?

B. Is there anything that you feel this area lacks?

C. What do you think of the exhibits? Are they child friendly?

D. Is there enough information and is it easy to see/understand?

On the day

The questions to be answered on the viewing platform faced stiff competition from the excitement of the viewing platform and arriving at Eden. Some of the children did give answers and some moved straight on to responding with the Widgit emotions (see below). Some examples of answers are shown below –

What do you think Eden is here for?

"2 impress some1, 4 charity

So people can go Ice skating, education, school trips.

To make St Austell better

To see all the different plants

Fun and exciting education

Do you think Eden has anything for children?

Most said yes

First impressions from the viewing platform

Impressive, exciting, wow

The children were all initially impressed with Eden except one. The children stood on the platform and took in the wonder of the Eden site, the staff moved within the groups. They listened to reactions and helped them take part in the activities that had been set. The children were busily sticking Widgeons on cards saying 'happy' 'excited' when a carer with Tyrone (Tyrone is registered blind with 5% residual vision) asked what he thought of the initial experience on the viewing platform:

"I feel sad, I am not sure what they are all excited about".

It is true that the initial experience of Eden is a spectacular visual experience as visitors see the biomes stuck to the side of the pit, the curves of colour cutting through the outdoor landscape in swathes punctuated by architectural plants and enticing artworks. It makes people want to explore, to go and discover. But this experience does not cater for every visitor and at the moment there is no alternative experience on offer.

The prompt questions were a useful fallback but once the groups had visited a few stops discussion became free flowing, and everyone was happily giving their opinion without having to be prompted. They were important as they helped focus people on the aspects we wanted to explore, and allowed the carers and teachers involved to keep the discussion relevant.

Disposable cameras



Each child was given a disposable camera at the start of the day for them to record their day out at Eden. The cameras were collected at the end and the pictures developed and sent to each child. This technique helped us understand what grabs the children's attention as they go round, what they pick out to be of interest and worthy of a photograph. The results were a real insight.

On the day

The cameras were popular with the children and some were used up soon into the day. It was positive to have them all documenting their journey around the project, we could observe them picking out objects of interest, see the scale they were interpreting and the variety of things that interested the individual children.

It was important that the children understood that all that was wanted was their opinion, there were no right or wrong answers, and to say whatever they felt. The cameras bring added value to the day and something for the children to remember the day by and that their opinion counts and is valued.

It meant extra cost for the project but allowed us very quickly to establish the children's views by giving them their own tools to express themselves. They provide an easy visual record of what experiences a child has when visiting the project.

Widgit emotions



What are Widgits?

Widgits are a pictorial language of symbols used predominantly for people with learning difficulties. The Widgit Rebus symbols have developed over the past 20 years and they are used in many countries worldwide.

The symbols are clean concise and suitable for all ages. They have been carefully designed to illustrate a single concept without adding unnecessary information such as gender.

They follow a schematic structure facilitating independent vocabulary development. There are over 7000 images in both colour and black & white covering a vocabulary of over 20,000 words. This vocabulary is continually being extended and gives access to a wide range of topics and curricular areas.



www.widgit.com

The pictorial symbols of the Widgit language are an easy way for children to express the emotions they are feeling. The following technique involved the children working in groups, they had been provided with a pack of different Widgits (multiples) that showed a range of emotions, they were asked to find the Widgit that best represented their current emotional response to the place they were in and then stick it onto a piece of card specific to each spot. The children had been given roles at the start of the day of keeper and recorder, the keeper would find the right Widgit within their packs and the recorder would stick it onto the card. The children had a card for each of the stops or could make new ones if they passed something they thought was really interesting/exciting, they could use the prompt questions if needed to figure out which emotional response was best suited.

On the day

The children had cards for each stop and a selection of Widgits in individual envelopes, this proved to be awkward when used at Eden especially in the bad weather outside. However the children all participated in creating Widgit cards for almost every stop and the results were very interesting. The technique proved useful and an easy way for children to record their responses, and we would recommend

using it, but with some adjustments. For example, reducing the number of different items involved in the activity.

As the children were working in small groups they had to work collaboratively to create the cards and discuss the emotions they felt (they did not have to agree). The children had previously responded with their individual responses to the questions. This helps to build confidence which will help when the children gather at the end of the day to feedback in a group situation.

Discussions on the move



It was important to stimulate discussion with the children as we went round, and to listen to what they had to say. Fortunately Eden is filled with many weird and wonderful things which made the children ask many questions if they had not come across things before, or to react quite vocally to the more familiar. As we did not have much time with the children it was also important to make them feel comfortable quickly, and get them relaxed with the new people so they would be happy to share their opinions. Talking with them was the best way we felt this would happen.

On the day

The children that the D&C Constabulary inclusion officers had arranged to take part on the day were happy to meet new people and share with everyone what they were thinking. As the children from the four schools were mixed into new groups they immediately found themselves interacting with new people, adults and children. A lot came out of talking to the children, this was particularly highlighted when the staff got together for the reflective discussion at the end of the day. Some children were happy to speak out in front of everyone sharing an opinion with the group, whilst others were best spoken to individually or in small numbers. However the discussion that took place gave plenty of insight into the children's experience, which overall was very positive.

It is worth mentioning here just how important this was for the staff involved, many of whom are involved in advising practitioners (including Eden project staff) on how to plan provisions to include the widest range of people. It is hard to predict some of the challenges faced by disabled people, which is why it is very important to work with, and learn from, people who have impairments in order to make informed decisions. If decisions made can respond with what people want rather than presumed needs a better experience can be provided for everyone.

Feedback discussions



The feedback session at the end of the day was a chance to bring the whole group together and for children to share their thoughts on each of the stops. We were fortunate to have the use of one of Eden's new classrooms in the Core building. We felt it was important to allow the children to react to one another's comments, and see the differences in opinions for the various exhibits they saw and experiences they had. We collected the thoughts on flip charts and these were compiled with the children.

On the day

Being out and about on site during the morning had been very exciting, so after a relaxing lunch everyone gathered for the final part of the day which was to be handled in a slightly more formal way. As we talked through each stop we had encouraged the children to share what they felt was both good and bad about each one. Everyone had the opportunity to speak and each comment was recorded on the flip chart.

A selection of the comments recorded –

Platform – Amazing, fantastic, better gap to look through for kids in wheelchairs, sad, nothing to touch, excited.

Wild Cornwall – Cornish, need more hands (referring to a piece of sculpture of a hand sticking out from the wall), like the beehive, xylophone too high to reach, thumbs up for xylophone and beehive.

The Humid Tropic Biome a.k.a. The Hot one – Hot, steamy, green, like the waterfall, could touch things (good), like Malaysian house, would like some parrots, big leaves, dark.

The Warm Temperate Biome a.k.a. The Warm one – Happy, bright, different smells, cool (temperature), would like to taste food, colourful, walking around enjoying myself, Robin, liked the peppers.

Recording the comments helped show the children the value of their opinions and the reason why they were there. The children had been told that by giving their opinions they were helping future children who will visit the Eden project (and hopefully wider as the report will be published on the Internet). The information they shared on the day will go on to inform design decisions and help ensure that the widest range of visitors to the Eden project can have the experience Eden intends them to have; one of discovery, excitement and fun providing something everyone can enjoy.

By sharing opinions in a group situation the children could see the differences in how they had responded. For example, in the Humid Tropic Biome one comment was 'I like the waterfall', but Tyrone, who was visually impaired, explained how the waterfall had made him feel uncomfortable, the unfamiliar noise, the random spray hitting his face. Things that make one person's experience exciting can make another's uncomfortable. The children in this group were perhaps more adept at understanding this due to their individual differences. It was a positive element to the discussion which made all involved think more widely about individual experiences and what that really means to a variety of people.

Observation



Observation is one of the best techniques to assess visitor interaction in public places, but it is often overlooked, perhaps because of the amount of staff time it requires. However, useful insights can be gained by observing visitors go through their day, from orienteering themselves, interacting with exhibits, information gathering, sharing with others, when they choose to rest, things that cause negative effects, right through to what sandwich they choose for lunch.

On the day, staff were asked to do as much observation as possible and record interesting comments or to photograph situations. Many of the staff involved were familiar with the Eden project and understood the challenges it faces from high visitor numbers, being a physically demanding site and receiving a wide and varied audience. The day included looking at provision made for young visitors to Eden,

and how the children in this group responded to them. This meant being aware of what the children looked at, touched, wanted to know more about, didn't quite understand, held their attention etc. This would also provide useful feedback for the Eden team to help inform future design decisions and evaluate past ones.

On the day

Staff reported that the day was rewarding and the activities straightforward to do with the children. A lot of knowledge and insight was gained through doing this, mainly specific to the Eden site. These will be shared with key members of Eden staff. But it also contributes in a wider sense to any work enhancing the visitor experience for any site including public parks, gardens and greenspaces.

A staff insight from the day:

“I believe there is something even more important than the knowledge gained from taking part directly in user consultation this way and this becomes particularly apparent when doing observation work. Having had a lot of input over the last 4 years to exhibits, design and access issues at the Eden project I have to make many decisions that will shape things in a certain way. As much as possible you can use experience, guidelines, common sense and design criteria but often you can only make assumptions. Nothing informs like first hand experience, spending time with people who have disabilities or impairments, sharing experiences and seeing what it is like for everyone. I believe this is an incredibly valuable and informative experience that gives staff an understanding of the issues individuals face that allows them to make better decisions in their work and practice.”

The staff were fortunate to have digital cameras that allowed them to take many photographs of what the children found interesting and also the children themselves interacting with exhibits and each other. This has provided them with a good visual record of the events of the day and how the children interacted, they are also helpful in demonstrating some of the issues raised when feeding back to the Eden team. The stories, anecdotes and thoughts the staff had were collected in the reflective discussion that followed.

Reflective discussion

To ensure the project was well documented we built in time for reflective discussion between the staff involved. This was done in several stages, the first immediately after the groups had gone home to get initial thoughts and reactions to the day, and then in subsequent meetings to start to distil some of the issues that came out of the day. This would help other people hoping to carry out similar projects and begin to construct the feedback for the Eden staff and web report. Reflection is an important part of any project as often responses to issues faced on the day can take time to come out after some consideration. Due to time constraints of a project, reflective discussion can be overlooked.

On the day

As the staff gathered for their first reflective discussion at the end of the day it was clear everyone was delighted with how it had gone and very tired. Over a pot of tea and a few slices of cake everyone started swapping stories about the day. As there were digital photographs they could be downloaded straightaway and shown as a slide show as a backdrop for the discussion. The discussion buzzed with what had been said, what was needed to help positive development at Eden, what Eden should be celebrating, funny things that happened, and things that were sad. Notes were scribbled and comments were recorded, these were then used as guides for the later reflective discussions. The discussion then moved on to how the knowledge gained from the day could best be used. The three main areas of information coming through were: solutions to design issues on the Eden site, future practice in user consultation sessions and issues for the report in the hope that similar work will be carried out at other sites.

The benefit of reflective discussion as outlined above should be taken seriously and built into the project timetable and budget. Having time immediately after the event allows everyone to get their memories down when they are fresh and they are captured with the emotion of the day. It is then equally as important to have time to revisit these ideas after a period of reflection to gain a more objective opinion to the day's findings.

What came out of the day

The day was intended to fulfil several objectives:-

With the help of the Officers from Devon & Cornwall Constabulary the children were taking part in the 'Day of the Volunteer'; they had volunteered to spend the day at Eden giving their opinions on the Eden experience to members of staff from the Sensory Trust.

The Sensory Trust was carrying out user consultation of the Eden project in order to assist Eden on future design decisions and taking the findings out to a wider audience through a published report and future training events.

The Eden project was going to receive a feedback session from the Sensory Trust providing them with information and assistance with future design decisions.

The day fulfilled these objectives and provided a range of reflections (outlined below) that are useful to those involved in the project and to others undertaking similar projects.

Reflections

- The importance of activity and structure
- Highs and lows of consultation
- A practitioner's response
- How to be a visitor
- Information provision
- What the children thought
- Suggestions for Eden
- What Eden should celebrate

The importance of activity and structure

It was imperative to the success of the day that it was well planned and had a solid structure. When working with consultation groups forward planning is essential. Having a series of activities that focus on the issues to be unpicked will guide you through the day/session and help you get the results you need. The day was

organised to ascertain the level of provision for children especially those with disabilities or impairments, so the day was made up of a combination of going round the site and seeing what the children picked up on and specific stops to look at individual experiences like an exhibit. As activities were to happen at certain exhibits it was important to allow enough time for these, the children were there to explore and discover, and to share their views, and this should not be rushed.

The plan must include a clear timetable, a meeting place that is easy to find and within easy reach of accessible toilets and shelter, realistic time for eating, toilet breaks when needed and rest points if a lot of moving around is involved. The consultees must feel valued and not hurried. It is also good to consider flexibility in the day's structure to make allowances for human nature.

It will be important for those running the consultation to ensure the day is well documented, recording comments and responses as well as photographs all this will help to analyse the results after the event.

Highs and lows of consultation

Consultation is a very important part of practice but it must be done properly with full consideration to the needs and expectations of those involved. Some people are willing to volunteer their time and others will need incentives for doing so. Either way the day must be well organised, with refreshments and comfort provisions. It is important to have given the consultees some advance notice of the types of activities they will be involved with, and to plan any provisions needed, such as good footwear and waterproof clothing. You will need to establish any specific needs your consultees may have, such as assistance pushing a wheelchair, provisions for assistance dogs or interpreters. Consider all the activities you are planning to undertake and what that means to each individual you have invited to take part. Building good relationships with consultation groups can be extremely beneficial to organisations, if a relationship can be established through successful sessions it can lead to a programme of consultation that offers continued benefits to all involved.

A practitioner's response

As a designer, user testing is an incredibly useful tool when making design and management decisions. However, not every detail can be user tested by enough people to cover the entire range of disabilities. Practitioners must therefore get into a mindset that allows them to think in a way where they consider what the experience they are providing would be like for all types of users. A good way to do this is to look at the multi sensory experiences on offer, the more senses that are stimulated through the experience the more it has to offer all people. If you are without one or more of your senses is there still something on offer? Other considerations are the access to and heights of the experience, if physical access is a challenging but necessary to the experience, e.g. play equipment, what other experiences are available to those who cannot access them.

Many good and comprehensive guidelines have now been written on inclusive design practice. However all sites are unique and offer different challenges, whether physical or intellectual, which is why it is so important for practitioners to understand why inclusive design is important and be involved with first hand experience of their sites to begin to develop an inclusive approach. Through working closely with people practitioners can begin to understand the affect their decisions have on visitors and the variety of considerations that are involved.

The involvement of practitioners was one of the main reasons for organising this project, both the involvement on the day of Sensory Trust staff and the feedback session with the Eden team. The reflective discussion immediately after the event revealed some of what the staff had picked up and things that would never have occurred to them before. Much of what the staff absorb from the day will not become apparent immediately but will come out in later design and management considerations that they make.

How to be a visitor

Often when visiting a site, people can feel unsure of what they are allowed to do or where they should go to get the best experience. Consultation work helps you see how visitors respond to your site. Is the orientation system available to all people, are the highlights obvious, are all your facilities easily identified and accessed? All

these things that sites put in place are often not tested in development stages and can fall short in practice.

We avoided making the day too prescriptive, and encouraged the children to discover things for themselves and to see how they interpreted. This helps reveal whether more guidance is needed to help visitors find the highlights available to them.

The children showed a great deal of respect for the Eden site. When encouraged they were very good at comparing textures of leaves and barks near to the paths, but on their own they were often unsure whether they were allowed to touch things. One of the leaves was a rubbery texture that was then remembered when we got to the rubber exhibit which has seats made of tyres, Charlie remarked that it was the same feel as the big leaf we had seen earlier. This type of recognition relied on exploring through touch, but it is difficult to encourage this without spelling it out on signs which defeats the point of discovery. There are also concerns in a well visited place like Eden that inviting people to touch plants would result in unacceptable damage. Eden can have 15000 visitors a day in peak season, which is a lot of hands and not much plant left by the end of the day!

Maybe there is more work to be done in setting the scene at the beginning of a visitor's journey around a site, so that more people are aware of how they can interact with the displays. It also emphasises the need to consider more sacrificial displays where damage can be dealt with by regular replacements of exhibit materials.



Information provision

Information at Eden is varied and gives the visitor choices. They can buy a guide-book and read about every exhibit and sign post, or just walk the site taking in the plants and art work, or something in between. Choice of information is important, plus knowing what those choices are and how they can be accessed. With alternative formats of information, such as Large Print or Braille, it is especially important to know where this can be found. Many people who know they need something particular will try to find out what is available before they go to a site, and pre-visit information is crucial. Often the first point of contact is the phone or Internet, and this can often be a deciding factor in whether or not to visit at all. This is why it is important for sites to promote what they have and ensure all information is kept up to date. It is also important for staff providing this information to have a good knowledge of specific visitors needs; disability awareness training can help give

confidence to staff to enable them to do this. This covers all staff involved in the provision of information, from those writing and providing it to those who pass it on to visitors.

After arriving at a site this clear provision of information must continue to support a visitor in both orientation and content.

One example of how this can affect a visit came out from the day. The feedback from Jess's carer said how much they had enjoyed themselves but were disappointed that they could not join the rest of the children in visiting the Waterfall at the top of the Humid Tropic Biome because Jess uses a wheelchair. The path on the approach to the waterfall splits in two - a relatively steep route takes people up a slope and past the waterfall and ends in a series of steps (which can be avoided by doubling back), and a level route without steps runs below the waterfall. The second route avoids the feature. On quiet days it is fine for wheelchairs and buggies/prams to go up to the waterfall and then double back. The route is quite steep but not impassable for wheelchair users with good upper body strength, strong pushers or motorised chairs.

Naturally, most people visiting Eden will want to include the major highlights, like the waterfall, as part of their visit, and the aim should be to provide access to the widest range of people. For future designs, this can be taken on board at the earliest stages of design, but for the waterfall the only options are through design modifications and management. The addition of resting points along the route, path widening and turning space by the waterfall have increased access, but on busy days it is difficult to offer wheelchair users, and pushchairs, the option of turning back on crowded paths. This is difficult to explain concisely on a sign. It is about choice and the ideal situation is if visitors in wheelchairs feel they are able and willing to go up and then double back they should be able to do that, but what is the best way to manage this? This requires further review, but possible actions include pre-visit information, providing assistance through the Access Eden scheme (if developed further) and providing more information when people arrive at Eden.

In the same way if a visitor arrives with a visual impairment they could be offered alternative formats of leaflets that Eden has available such as large print and Braille. Some of which can also be downloaded from the Internet to allow visitors to absorb

information before they arrive. Some sites offer a mail out and return service for Braille as it can often be bulky in size and awkward to carry around.

The most important thing is to ensure delivery of what you want to communicate in a way that the people you are aiming it at are able to understand and access it.



What the children thought

The children all thoroughly enjoyed the day and would be keen to come back again and take part in more user testing. They were more than happy to share their opinions, felt Eden had a lot to offer children and had helpful suggestions of what else could be offered.

Heights of features and exhibits were mentioned many times, from handrails obstructing their views to exhibit highlights and information being out of reach. They were not always sure what they were allowed to do and had they been visiting without the support of Sensory Trust staff they would have been even more cautious and reserved about what they could and couldn't interact with.

From the completed Widgit emotion cards it is clear to see they were all happy and excited about being at Eden. They especially enjoyed being in the biomes, but this may have been influenced by the bad weather outside. They were very good at

picking up on the atmosphere of the different places, using descriptions like calm, space, light and dark. The different affects on the senses they felt, hot, warm, and the smells that changed throughout the biomes.

They all felt their visit was too short and would have liked more time to explore at their own pace and more time to talk afterwards about what they had seen. They were all very grateful for the experience of visiting Eden and making new friends. This means they are likely to be keen to help with further user-testing, perhaps next time for more specific feedback on individual exhibits or themes.



Suggestions for Eden

I would strongly advise Eden to carry out more user testing with both children and adults with different disabilities and other socially excluded groups, at both the design and implementation stage. It is also important to take forward any information that results from consultation into future design and management decisions, as this can avoid costly retrofitting or visitor disappointment.

It would also be important for Eden staff to lead the user testing to see first hand the issues that are raised – we learnt a lot from being responsible for someone's visit and the experience they have. The individuals involved also come back to your mind when you are making those important decisions later, how would Jess enjoy this? What would Tyrone get from this? Would Katie find this cool?

What Eden should celebrate

Eden should celebrate the experience it offers, its multi sensory approach that is ever increasing. Eden tries to offer a good experience to every visitor regardless of age, disability or background, Eden is about information and choice, showing people how their relationship with plants affects everything they do. Communication is key and Eden does this well, it gives the stories of the world today without forcing an opinion onto its visitors; it only provides the information visitors need to form their own opinions. Through work with the Sensory Trust, its range of accessible information is increasing and much more is planned for the year ahead. Through this provision it ensures everyone who visits the site or website will be able to make those decisions as to how they live, shop and work.

Some of the positive things that were highlighted included:

- Specific facilities that help accommodate consultation at Eden
- Good parking facilities including ample accessible parking that exceeds DDA requirements
- Toilets at entrance and at regular points throughout the site
- Visual scene setting on platform at entrance
- Well laid out paths of good size and surface
- Exciting and stimulating art work
- Atmospheric environments e.g. a jungle
- Different smells / sensory experiences

- Facilities for groups to gather
- Catering provisions for groups

An example of a small thing Eden has done, that should be celebrated as it makes a big difference, is the peepholes in the viewing platform. After receiving feedback that the viewing platform sides were a problem for people under a certain height Eden's in house design team responded by getting their drills out and setting to work on the platforms sides. They created circular peep-holes big enough to give people that exciting first glimpse of Eden, with colourful paintwork around them inviting visitors to take a peek. They proved very popular on the day for both those that could and couldn't see over the platform sides!



In Summary

The day was a success; all involved had a really good time with important and relevant comments coming out that can be used by all the organisations involved. There were a number of key findings for those planning similar consultation sessions:

- Running consultation needs to be well organised with clear objectives for the session, making sure there are plenty of staff to help and benefit from the day.
- Ensure consultees are well looked after and given incentives, refreshments or whatever is appropriate.
- Have as many options for recording people's opinions as possible, from group to individual thoughts, both written and photographed. Documenting well on the day allows you to share information afterwards easily.
- Develop techniques that can be used with all types of groups to allow comparative results and try to repeat regularly.
- Publish reports and findings if possible to allow others to see effectiveness of techniques and outcomes.

Special thanks are due to the Cornwall Children's Fund, David Thompson and David Buckland (D & C Constabulary), Suzanne Husband and Jane Knight (Eden Project), Chris Stoneham (Henry Box School) and all the Children who were fantastic, not forgetting all of those who got the children there and looked after them.

For further details on projects that the Sensory Trust, Eden Project, Devon & Cornwall Constabulary, and the Cornwall Children's fund have been involved in please visit our websites.

www.sensorytrust.org.uk

www.edenproject.com

www.police.tk/

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