



Interim Report 2022/23

Evaluation of CAE Pathways Academy

Supporting disabled people into work

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Executive Summary

Funded by City Bridge Trust, Pathways Academy was established by the Centre for Accessible Environments to tackle the unemployment gap for young disabled Londoners.

Almost 400,000 disabled Londoners are unemployed and, in some boroughs, only one in four disabled people are working¹. Research by Citizens Advice found that of people at risk of being made redundant when the pandemic hit, 27% were Disabled people. London is a difficult place for disabled people to get work. According to a report by the Social Market Foundation¹, the capital is “wasting huge opportunities” to make its economy bigger and fairer because disabled Londoners are not being fully supported into work. Young disabled people are vital to the future of London’s workforce, supporting the capital to be a fairer and more equitable place to live and work. Their careers should be testament to London’s world leading commitment to inclusion.

Pathways Academy launched in October 2020 at the height of the COVID pandemic to support young disabled people into sustainable work in the inclusion sector. Two years in and Pathways has trained 25 young disabled people and will by the end of third year have supported and trained 40 disabled people. Before training started only 20% were in some form of volunteering or work, however, after Pathways this had trebled to **67% successfully working in the inclusion sector**. Pathways has proved instrumental in supporting young disabled people into work and into inclusion related roles.

Pathways is a finalist twice in the Women in Housing Awards 2023 – the programme itself as a finalist in the *Best career development initiative* and CAE’s Head of Business Development, Fara Muneer, shortlisted as *Inclusion Champion* for leadership of the programme.



CAE is now looking to the future to build on this success, seeking funding to continue the success of Pathways in supporting more disabled people into work.

¹ <https://www.trustforlondon.org.uk/news/supporting-disabled-people-work/> 2018

City Bridge Trust- Bridge to Work

The City Bridge Trust, the City of London Corporation's charitable funder, has a stated commitment to tackling disadvantage in London and making it a fairer and better place to live and work.

Although employment rates have risen steadily in the capital over the last ten years, only half of working age disabled people in London are in paid work. This compares to nearly 80 per cent of non-disabled people in employment. By age 26 disabled people are nearly four times more likely to be unemployed and, research indicates, by this point they are much more likely to feel frustrated, disillusioned and believe nothing they do will make a difference. This disadvantage has major long-term costs and leads to more disabled people living in poverty and claiming benefits for long periods of their lives. According to a report from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation 'Monitoring poverty and social exclusion 2016' disabled people account for half of those in poverty. Overlooking such a significant segment of the London workforce is also a waste of talent, experience and perspectives which could help businesses in the capital to grow by better representing the diverse range of customers they serve.

The Bridge to Work programme funded **Centre for Accessible Environments (CAE) Pathways Academy** to support and empower 40 young disabled people into sustainable employment in inclusive design related careers. The funding was for three years to 2023.



About CAE

CAE is a not-for-profit organisation and is a leading authority on inclusive design in the UK. Our mission is simple – to help to deliver inclusive environments. Our aim is to ensure environments can be accessed, used and enjoyed by everyone. The social model of disability is crucial to every aspect of our work. We believe that people are disabled by barriers in society and negative public attitudes, rather than by their own impairments.

Training is central to CAE's mission to share knowledge and expertise about access in the built environment. As the leading training provider in the field, CAE was the first organisation to offer training for access auditors and consultants. Our courses are a precursor for many professionals who now work in the access arena.

CAE is part of Habinteg Housing Association with a shared mission to drive greater inclusion in homes, workplaces, and neighbourhoods to enable everyone to be part of an inclusive society.



“

I've seen first-hand how impactful the Bridge to Work programme has been through my work with Whizz Kids who are a long term project partner of the scheme. For young disabled Londoners like me, it can be an anxiety fuelled journey trying to find a job. This is why we need more programmes that support disabled people into work. I think it's great that CAE are not only providing disabled people with employment support, but are encouraging them into careers in inclusive design, which is a subject that effects all disabled people.”

Sam Renke, Actress and disability campaigner

CAE's Pathways Academy

Pathways aims to support young disabled people into the inclusion sector through a structured programme providing training, mentoring and networking support.

It is a nine-month programme training programme providing an overview of the principles of inclusive design and skills-based training delivered by NRAC qualified access consultants. Pathways supports disabled people to have the knowledge to advise on accessibility of the built environment, supporting a more inclusive society.

Currently there are no formalised apprenticeship/ training programs into inclusive design or access-related employment. In addition, in the access profession there is a shortage of skills and with many access consultants approaching retirement. The number of jobs in the inclusion sector are increasing with the growth of 'Diversity and Inclusion' (D & I) strategies and social impact reporting. Pathways trainees would be ideal candidates for these roles and bring with them a unique combination of technical skills and lived experience.

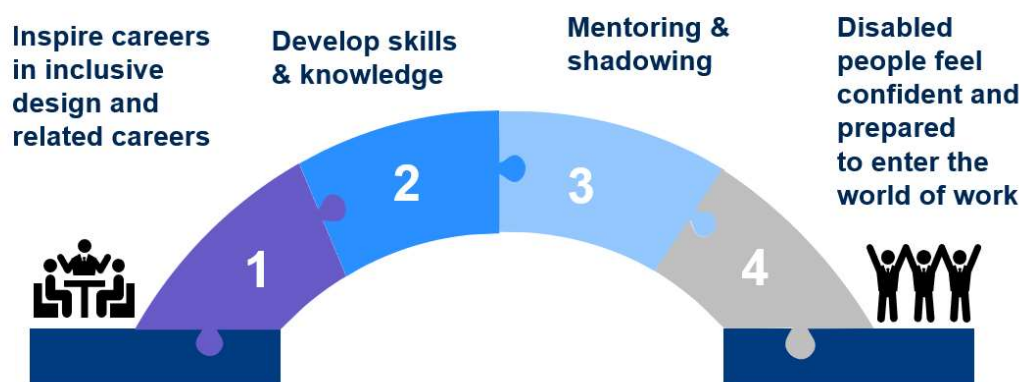


Theory of change

Pathways supports the Social Model of Disability, which states that people are disabled by the barriers they face in society and not by their impairment. If we removed these barriers, it would create a more equal society where disabled people can live independently and have more control over their lives.

Young disabled people face inequalities in society, workplaces and services. They lag behind in employment compared to young people who are not disabled. In addition it's likely that disabled young people will end up in jobs with worse pay and conditions than their parents: they have downward social mobility. Pathways aims to support upward mobility through providing technical training and support into long term jobs. Pathways' aims are;

- A sustainable programme supporting young disabled people into paid employment.
- Young disabled Londoners will become empowered to seek careers that will impact the accessibility of the built environment in London.
- More people working in inclusion with a diverse range of experiences, and first-hand experience of disability.



The outcomes are aligned to the Theory of Change (ToC) for the Bridge To Work programme which map out the process and participant journey and how the program will bring about positive change. These were captured following a series of workshops with partners held for City Bridge Trust by Disability Rights UK and Learning & Work Institute in 2019².

² <https://www.citybridgetrust.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Bridge-to-Work-Year-1-report.pdf>

Training modules

Training is designed to develop knowledge and skills on access and disability awareness in the built environment and is aligned to accreditation as an auditor or access consultant.



The students learn both technical skills on inclusive design such as audits, website accessibility, housing standards and wayfinding but also pick up wider skills such as writing reports, presentation skills and working as an access and inclusion expert. Pathways training received **98% positive feedback** from students. Pathways' training supports students by providing a strong foundation of training and practical experience to apply for access and inclusion related roles.



Barriers to employment

As part of the application process students were asked about their reason for applying and many shared their experience in job hunting. The main themes that emerged from students included:

- Employers' lack of understanding of impairments
- Impact of COVID 19 on job prospects and work experience
- Barriers to application process due to their disability
- Some jobs required work experience.
- Affordability of training to support their job prospects.

“

“Like many disabled individuals, I have experienced difficulties with past employers. Finding a suitable job – let alone a worthwhile and fulfilling career – is, therefore, a challenge.” **Pathways student.**

“Before lockdown I was volunteering on Tuesdays and Wednesday. However, since Lockdown I have not been volunteering.”
Pathways student.

“I have been job hunting for the last two years. By joining this training, I hope to find a job role which I can manage with my disability and being with others who have disability will be a great learning opportunity.”

“How do I get my colleagues to include me without making me feel different? The voluntary sector seems to have a greater understanding. Employers seem to have more difficulty.”
Pathways student.

“My conditions are not stopping me from reaching for my goals, they only make me work harder.”
Pathways student.

Where were the trainees from?

CAE worked with partners on the Bridge to Work program to recruit trainees and these included Muscular Dystrophy UK (MDUK), National Autistic Society (NAS), Inclusion London, My AFK, Mencap, RNIB and other disability led organisations. In addition, we used social media to advertise Pathways. Recognising that not all disabled people may be connected to charities, in 2022 we commissioned a disabled 'influencer' Jessica Ping Wild who created videos on benefits of Pathways that we shared on Instagram, LinkedIn and twitter and proved very successful in raising awareness of Pathways.

Pathways students came from 14 London boroughs, and we have had representation from **44% of the Greater London area.**



Our aim is to extend the promotion of the programme to those boroughs we have not had representation from and expand criteria to any age as well as seek funding to expand Pathways Academy into a national initiative.



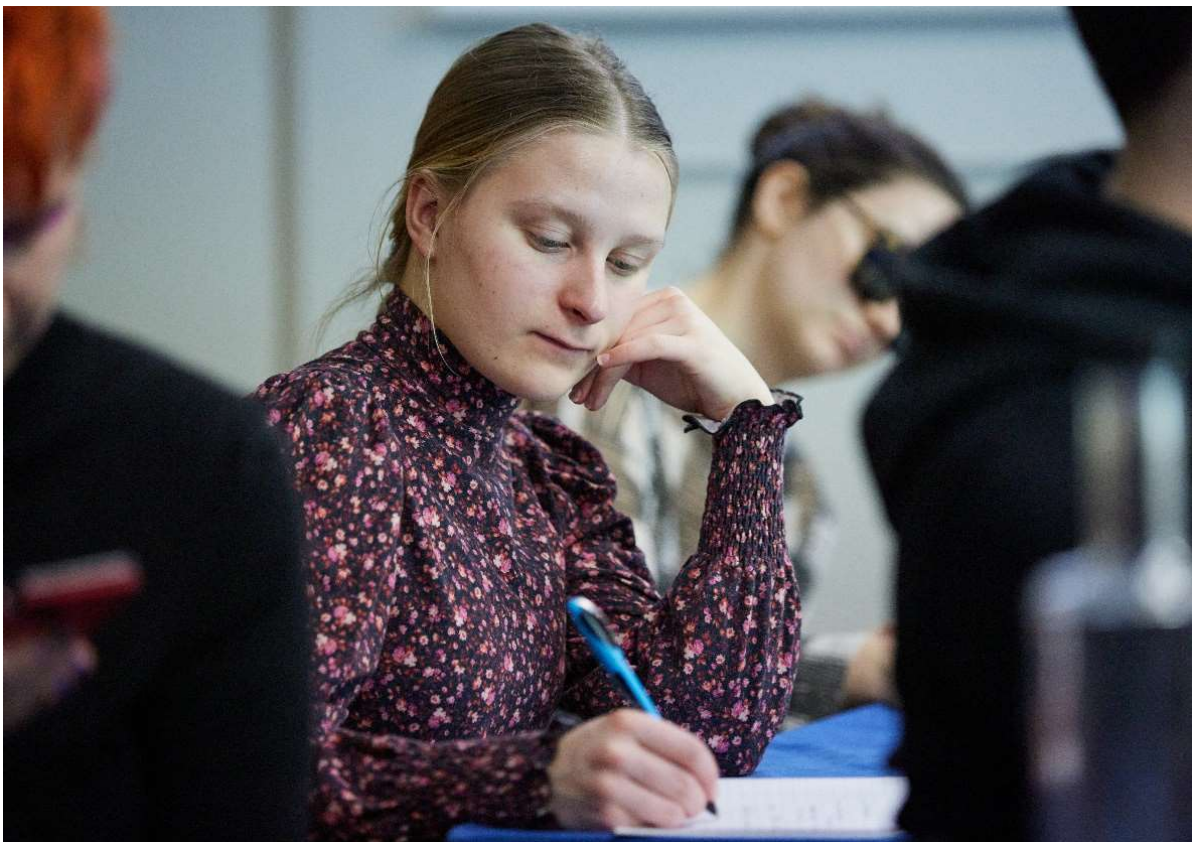
What has been achieved?

How disabled young people benefited from Pathways.

Pathways Academy has been running for two years (2020/21 and 2021/22) and we are now in the third year. So far 40 young disabled people have benefitted from training and support. At the start of the programme many of the students were either not working or working in roles that were not sustainable such as volunteering or part time roles. All expressed a wish to learn technical skills and have the confidence to apply for jobs in the inclusion sector for long term sustainable employment.

Hear what students had to say about Pathways.

“A year ago, I didn’t know anything about inclusive design, but the training I’ve received has helped me repair my self-confidence and believe that, yes, I can do this……. I pushed myself and took a chance on applying and it’s been the best decision of my life. Not only has Pathways Academy given me the confidence to pursue a new career, but it’s also introduced me to a group of like-minded peers.” Pathways Student



Pathways Outcomes

Many students wanted to pursue a qualification for access auditing and had some exposure to access work such as volunteering on an access panel or volunteering at theatres or museums. At the start of the training, we asked trainees about their current understanding of inclusive design, many expressed some knowledge but **only 4% reporting they had a strong knowledge** of this area. By the end of the programme all had gained a good understanding of inclusive design with **56%** reporting they had a strong knowledge of inclusive design.

- ✓ **67% working in inclusion jobs.**
- ✓ **Increased confidence in working in a team.**
- ✓ **Stronger problem solving skills.**
- ✓ **Confidence in presentation skills**
- ✓ **Increased confidence to apply for jobs in inclusive design or related fields.**
- ✓ **Peer support**

One student said “I have a real interest in making spaces, in particular museums and galleries, accessible to everyone. I want to become qualified to give access audits at more institutions, and to potentially gain paid work from this. In the long term I would like to have a business where I give access advice to arts institutions and museums.”



Did Pathways support students into work?

Many of the trainees at the start of the program were either looking for jobs or volunteering, some were working in part time jobs on zero hours contracts such as in hospitality or care and 80% were looking for long term sustainable jobs. Before Pathways only 12% of trainees felt confident to apply for jobs in the inclusion sector but by the end of Pathways **78% felt confident to apply for jobs in inclusion**. Post Pathways **67% are working in the inclusion sector** – roles included working within Disability led organisations, working in creative arts industry and being self-employed offering inclusion or access advice or training. We continue to monitor trainees on their career journey after completing Pathways.



Student Sana took up an internship at CAE, she said: *“I hope, long term, that the training will help me transition into a job where I’ll play a part in improving access and diversity for visitors and staff”*.

Student Alice said *“Other trainees on the course have a wealth of varied experience and we all have diverse needs. As a result, they offer great insight into this field, and I am learning from them as well as from our tutors. In that respect.”*

“Pathways programme will empower me to help make the Heritage industry, especially museums and galleries, more inclusive, diverse, and accessible” Pathways student 2021.

“Pathways is a masterclass in inclusivity, in content and practices.”

Next steps

Everyone should have the same opportunity for a fulfilling working life regardless of whether they have an impairment or health condition. Pathways has proven to be a game changer with strong outcomes supporting disabled people to develop the skills and confidence to gain sustainable long-term work. This will help grow the economy and create more jobs and opportunities to be an active citizen.

The recent White Paper launched by the Department for Work and Pensions ‘ Transforming Support: The Health and Disability White Paper (2023) aims to support more disabled people into work, Pathways can be a solution for those who want to turn their passion for inclusion into a career.

CAE are seeking funding to extend Pathways to disabled people of any age who have an interest in a career in inclusion. There is still more to be done to support disabled people into work and bridge the unemployment gap.



Pathways students' stories

Aisling, Pathways trainee 2020/21

After being accepted onto Centre for Accessible Environments' (CAE) Pathways Academy, Aisling combined their love for theatre with their passion for access and found a new job. They began a role working on the inclusion of deaf and disabled artists in a mainstream theatre in East London.

Aisling said: "I randomly came across the Pathways Academy and thought it was the perfect way to educate myself on the profession I've always wanted to be in," However, Aisling was worried about having to juggle jobs and do the course on top of that. "It was a lifesaver for me that Pathways Academy was completely virtual as I'm not sure how I would've coped otherwise. As it's an online course, it meant that I could take things at my own pace on the days I had lots of work to do or wasn't feeling great."



Making the most of the Academy

When Aisling first started Pathways, they didn't know what to expect. As the course was only in its first year, there was no previous cohort from whom to learn how effective it would be.

As the weeks went on, Aisling realised that it was exactly what they had been looking for – a course that provides skills in inclusive design and prepares them for a career as a consultant – but they still weren't sure about how effective the virtual format would be.

“I was anxious about learning via Zoom, but it was better than I expected. I could read the presentations in my own time and if I was ever stuck or confused about something, the trainers were at hand to clarify,” they said.

“I was also worried I'd be underwhelmed by some of the modules I was less interested in, but I learnt that skilled and knowledgeable trainers can make anything interesting.”

Gaining skills for life

And things got even more interesting when, while still training, Aisling was offered a job at a theatre company in East London as an Agent for Change. The role is heavily centred on inclusion for disabled people and ensures that access and inclusion is front and centre at all theatre management meetings.

“Even though access consultancy has been something I've been interested in for a long time, it wasn't until I joined Pathways Academy that I understood the steps I needed to take to do the job well and become an accredited consultant,” Aisling says.

Aisling will complete their East London theatre contract in the next few months and also has ambitions to continue their access training.

“Pathways was a great first step into the inclusive design world, but I'm not naïve enough to think the work stops here. Now I know this is the career I want to be in, I'll continue to develop my skills and hopefully, in the near future, I can call myself an accredited access consultant.”

Sana, Pathways trainee 2020/21

“A year ago, I didn’t know anything about inclusive design, but the training I’ve received has helped me repair my self-confidence and believe that, yes, I can do this. Now, I’m part of a new community and I feel like this career was destined for me,” says Pathways Academy trainee Sana Khan.

Prior to joining Pathways, she had been made redundant due to the Covid-19 pandemic and was finding it tough to secure a new job. After months of searching, Sana was at a low point, until she came across information about the Pathways Academy and realised a career in access and inclusive design was a good fit. She said “I had experience in everything from retail and hospitality work to charity work, but I just couldn’t find an appropriate job - I started to think, maybe, it’s because I’m disabled,”

Life before Pathways

Sana was officially diagnosed with Asperger’s Syndrome and Dyspraxia when she was 26 after going through mainstream schooling in two countries.

“My personal experience with disability has been complex”, she says. “Being diagnosed as an adult means that I’m still figuring out what works for me and what doesn’t.

“It was a relief to get a diagnosis and be able to explain why I’ve always felt like I don’t fit in. And, one reason I joined the Pathways Academy is that I believed it’d help me figure out and better understand my needs.”



Benefits of a virtual course

At first, Sana thought she might miss out on key aspects of learning as Pathways Academy is a virtual programme. But as time went on, she realised she could reap many benefits from the online format.

“For the most part, I enjoyed that it was virtual. It meant that I didn’t have to spend an hour travelling into Central London for the sessions. It also let me focus on my mental health and, as I was in my own home, I was able to get comfortable with the sessions more quickly.

“While I found the group work a little challenging at times - as it’s usually easier to read design plans and other material in person - the learning environment meant I became more focussed on not talking over other people accidentally, and I had plenty of practice in verbally describing images.”

Where to from here?

Sana hopes that her Pathways training will open up a career in the Heritage sector.

“I hope, long term, that the training will help me transition into a job in a museum or heritage site where I’ll play a part in improving access and diversity for visitors and staff.

“In the meantime, I’m looking forward to starting my career as an Access and Inclusion Consultant.”

A leap into the future

To other young disabled people considering the Pathways Academy programme and a career in access, Sana’s advice is “take the leap!”

“I was so nervous about applying, especially as I have an invisible disability. I felt like maybe I’d stand out and not belong, like people would question why I was there,” she says.

“I worried about the fact that I only had informal, personal experiences with disability and inclusive design. Not to mention that it’s so different from anything I’ve done before.

“But I pushed myself and took a chance on applying and it’s been the best decision of my life. Not only has Pathways Academy given me the confidence to pursue a new career, it’s also introduced me to a group of like-minded peers.”

Agne, Pathways trainee 2020/21

When Agne Verescagina first heard about the Centre for Accessible Environment's (CAE) Pathways Academy, she didn't expect it to have half the impact that it did on her skillset.

Now, over one year on, Agne has benefitted from an array of new skills, including audit writing, digital inclusion and designing for neurodiversity.

Balancing university and Pathways

Agne has been studying Psychology and Counselling BSc at Open University for the past 2 years. When the opportunity to join Pathways came up, she thought it would be a strong counterpart to her degree.

"I've always wanted to work in inclusive design so the Pathways Academy was the perfect course to go hand in hand with my degree which didn't include anything on access or disability inclusion", Agne says.

"And while my Psychology degree focuses more on theory and reading, the Pathways programme is filled with exercises and interactive activities."

While Agne's university course is virtual, just like Pathways, it's not accessible enough for her.

"I feared the Pathways programme would be riddled with the same accessibility barriers as my degree. When I would attend my Zoom university classes, there was always issues, with cameras being off or lack of transcription for those who are visually impaired."

"I was glad to find that the Pathways' trainers made a proactive effort to make the



programme inclusive for all its students. The trainers also ensured no-one was left behind and answered any questions from students.”

Highlights of the programme

The Pathways programme is split into 11 modules across 12 months. Students have two days of training per month, equating to 22 days across the year.

“It is a rich course with useful content and exercises, but a key part for me was learning how to write and construct audits. Whether someone uses it for inclusive design purposes or just general architecture, audit writing is an extremely useful skill to have,” said Agne.

Life after Pathways

The programme has prepared Agne for a career in inclusive design, but she believes that her new skills will benefit more than just disability roles and organisations.

“I’d like to think that I can use the skills I’ve learnt in Pathways in any future role I work in, even if it’s not related to disability. I should be able to join any organisation and hopefully make it more accessible for staff and customers.”

“I’d really be keen to use what I’ve learnt to make an impact in the mental health sector. As someone who has used mental health services before, I’ve seen first-hand where it falls short for disabled people. There is not enough attention being given to invisible disabilities and proper signposting at facilities isn’t common.”

“I hope my new skills will allow me to bring more of what is missing for disabled people in these services.”

Nicky, Pathways trainee 2021/22

In 2020, Nicky Sutherland graduated from university amid a global pandemic and was ready to embark on a new career. The job market had little to offer, and there didn't seem to be opportunities out there that interested her.

The few jobs she was interested in either rejected her application or ignored her completely; she was lost for options and became more disheartened by the day.



Opening my eyes to a whole new world of access

“Access, to me, was a bottomless pit of standards and regulations. It wasn't something I was interested in, but the Pathways taster session certainly changed that. I had no idea how many layers there were to the topic,” says Nicky.

Unwelcoming job market

By 2021, Nicky had found a role at Muscular Dystrophy UK (MDUK). However, the position was only for three months, and she knew she'd have to throw herself back into the job market again.

“My time at MDUK was almost over, and the thought of being in the same position as I was a year ago made me really anxious,” Nicky says.

Having a taste

Nicky took part in a Pathways taster online session with eight other prospective students.

“The programme allowed me to pick apart inclusive design and see what interests me. It opened my eyes to the inaccessibility baked into many aspects of society, and it's certainly made me want to learn more.

“The virtual format is also really beneficial as I have chronic fatigue issues. I’m not sure I would’ve been able to travel in to do the course face-to-face, so I really like this more accessible style of learning.”

Exploring the modules

The Pathways Academy programme has 11 modules ranging from access auditing to accessible housing design and students are expected to attend two sessions a month.

“The accessible housing module was probably one of my favourites as it showed me just how necessary some of the designs are. The accessible technology module was also fascinating.

“Not only did it open my eyes to some great pieces of tech, but it also helped me with my current role at the [Business Disability Forum](#) (BDF) as I’m regularly scrutinising organisations’ websites for inaccessibility.”

Making business accessible

After being on the Pathways programme for two months, Nicky was able to land a Business Development role at BDF, which specialises in making business more accessible for disabled people.

“If I’m honest, I didn’t think I’d get the job as my degree was in an unrelated subject, and my experience was the complete opposite of business development. But thankfully, BDF seemed to place a lot of value on my Pathways Academy training.”

Nathan, Pathways Student 2020/21

Nathan* was volunteering in museums, joining accessibility advisory panels and suggesting inclusive venue improvements for disabled people. He had been looking for a job and opportunity to learn more about inclusive design. So, when he heard about the Pathways Academy, he knew it would be a great way to transform his passion into a career.

“I usually volunteer at different museums, advising them on how to make the space more accessible for disabled guests. As I’m visually impaired I mainly advise on light issues and pathfinding. “I’m very passionate about inclusive design and feel as though people are only made disabled by the inaccessibility of the space they are in.

Being visually impaired

“As the course was led by CAE, I felt reassured that it would be as inclusive as possible. I wasn’t wrong. It seemed as though the trainers already had background knowledge on the students and tailored the training when needed. “I thought that maybe I’d get left behind as I usually need more time to understand images, but the trainers ensured I was always sent attachments early so I can look at them before the class would begin. They would also describe the images when I needed.”



What next for Nathan?

“I’ve spent a long time working with museums to make them more accessible and I feel as though this role will be more important than ever after the pandemic. Lockdown has shown us all how important space and accessibility is. But as we gradually reclaim some of our freedom and emerge from our homes, it’s important to remember that some disabled people will still be in lockdown, as the virus hasn’t disappeared.

“I want to use what I’ve learnt at the Pathways Academy to support such people and help museums and other places of leisure to be more welcoming for disabled people in person and perhaps online. I know with the training I’ve had that I’ll be able to make a big difference for the disabled community and others.

“I know first-hand how it feels to not want to go somewhere because you feel you’ll encounter some sort of accessibility barrier. The post-pandemic world will need to remove these barriers in order to let disabled people be included, and I hope I can be a part of making that happen.”

**In this case study the student’s name has been changed for anonymity*