

Good Examples

Helping Organisations to Work in an Inclusive Way

About the Project

[Inclusion International](#) and our member, Friendly Barn Development Foundation in Zambia, worked together on a project about making the self-advocacy movement stronger.

Self-advocates are people with intellectual disabilities who know their rights and speak up for themselves. The big goal of the project was to support people with intellectual disabilities in Southern Africa to learn about their rights, speak up, and work together.

For self-advocacy groups to be strong, their organisations need to support and include them.



[Listen Include Respect](#) is a set of international guidelines that help organisations learn how to include people with intellectual disabilities in different parts of their work.

This good example is about how a project can use the Listen Include Respect guidelines to help an organisation learn to include people with intellectual disabilities and new self-advocacy groups in their work better.

How the Project used Listen Include Respect

We wanted to make sure that this project was inclusive from the start. Talking to all of the partners about Listen Include Respect from the beginning would make things more inclusive when the self-advocacy work started.

Training our Partners

The project started with a self-advocate who is expert on Listen Include Respect training Friendly Barn Development Foundation about the guidelines.

We explained the '[Principles](#)' which are the big ideas that inclusive organisations believe in. We also shared the [How-Tos](#), which explain the steps you need to take to include people in different parts of work, like meetings and communication.

Friendly Barn agreed with the big ideas for being an inclusive organisation right away. But some ideas were more new. For example, the idea that an organisation can accidentally create barriers in their work was a difficult idea at first, because Friendly Barn were focusing on barriers outside of their organisation.

It helped when we gave some examples from Inclusion International about how we found and removed barriers in our work. Giving this example showed that lots of organisations face these challenges, and we can all make changes to be more inclusive.



Showing what inclusive meetings look like

One of the first activities in this project was self-advocacy training for people with intellectual disabilities in Zambia. We ran the “Empower Us” training programme.

[Empower Us](#) is a training programme that helps people with intellectual disabilities learn about human rights and how to advocate. The training was created by a global team of self-advocates.

Empower Us training is always led by self-advocates, setting a great example for the participants. One of the big ideas of Listen Include Respect is that inclusive organisations make opportunities for self-advocates to be leaders, and Empower Us helps show what self-advocate leadership in training looks like.



We also followed the Listen Include Respect Guidelines about inclusive meetings for the Empower Us training.

At the start of the training, we all set ground rules about how we wanted to follow different parts of Listen Include Respect, like agreeing to use easy-to-understand language. Everyone got the materials ahead of time to prepare, there were clear agendas, we took breaks, there was a pre-meeting for supporters to learn their role, and we used different ways to help people learn like role-plays and videos.

Managing the Project in an Inclusive Way

In every part of the project, we made sure to follow the [principles](#) of Listen Include Respect:

Accessible Communication:

All of the information about the project was written in plain language. This started from the very beginning, including when we invited Friendly Barn to join the project. Our project contracts, budgets, and reports were always easy to understand. This helped to set the expectation that the project would be inclusive.

Self-advocate leadership:

We made sure there were self-advocate leaders planning the project from the very start. The Project Manager for this work at Inclusion International was a self-advocate.

We also encouraged Friendly Barn to hire a self-advocate to be their Project Coordinator too. They hired Ruth, a member of their brand-new self-advocacy group, as project staff after the Empower Us training. Having self-advocates leading the project at the global level and at the country level helps show other organisations that self-advocate leadership is possible.

“Being a leader means that I represent others, not just myself. I speak on behalf of people in my group who are still building their confidence. Leadership is not just about talking—it’s about listening, guiding others, and being an example.”

Ruth, Self-Advocate and Project Coordinator at Friendly Barn

Valuing the Process:

We know the process of using Listen Include Respect is as helpful as the result. Working together with self-advocates to make things more inclusive helped the staff at Friendly Barn to learn more about inclusion. We had lots of conversations during the project about what the organisation was learning from using Listen Include Respect.

Talking about the process helps us learn, even when we make mistakes.

Understanding Inclusion is a Journey: No organisation is perfect, and no organisation will get it exactly right the first time. Sharing examples of how Inclusion International still tries to make changes and use the guidelines better helped to show that every step matters, and we all have a responsibility to keep trying to work in more inclusive ways.



Changing Ways of Working

Since learning about Listen Include Respect, Friendly Barn has changed they share their information, prepare meetings, and include people with intellectual disabilities in their activities.

As a cross-disability organisation that represents all people with disabilities, they saw that these changes have been good for everyone in their organisation, not just people with intellectual disabilities.

The biggest change Friendly Barn made for the project was about the decision-making power they gave to self-advocates.

Self-advocates had never taken part in planning the organisation's work before, and playing the role of a support person instead of a decision-maker was new for staff at Friendly Barn.

During the Empower Us training, self-advocates picked some of the topics and planned some advocacy activities. This showed the staff that self-advocates are able to do this work and want to take the lead in planning.

Friendly Barn is a cross-disability organisation, so before this project, people with intellectual disabilities were not a big part of their work.

But now they know more about how people with intellectual disabilities are excluded, they want to support self-advocates to take center stage in the cross-disability movement.

There is also now a self-advocate on the Board of Directors of the Friendly Barn Development Foundation!



“Before we learned about self-advocacy, we didn't work with self-advocates as people who could actively contribute. Instead, we viewed them as a vulnerable group who couldn't speak up for themselves. We were overprotective and always spoke for them.”

*Amos, Executive Director of
Friendly Barn*



This new commitment is clear in Friendly Barn's work. For example, when they were working on shadow reporting for Zambia's report to the CRPD Committee, they made sure that 2 self-advocates were part of the team. They also helped get a self-advocate nominated to represent the [Zambian disability movement](#) at a meeting of the CRPD Committee in Geneva. Friendly Barn learning about and using Listen Include Respect helped the whole Zambian disability movement realise that they could be more inclusive.



“Friendly Barn supports me to attend community meetings and training workshops to represent the organisation. Because of this, I'm now known by other organisations and even local media.

Ruth, Self-Advocate and Project Coordinator at Friendly Barn



Using Listen Include Respect in the project has also helped Friendly Barn to realise what they *don't* know, and know when to ask for help or advice. For example, they asked for support when they were hiring their new Project Coordinator, because they had never hired a person with an intellectual disability before. They started following their normal process, but then they realised their job contracts were not easy to understand.



Challenges and Lessons

We faced some challenges during our project, and we have worked with Friendly Barn to think about how we can make things better.

Language and Interpretation:

One challenge was language. We used a language interpreter at the Empower Us training so that people could take part in Bemba and English. Sometimes it can be hard to tell when you are using an interpreter if the big ideas are coming across clearly, or if people are finding things easy to understand.

We knew that having self-advocacy training in local languages helps more people to take part, so it is important to have interpretation. But interpreters also might accidentally exclude people.

We learned that it was important to also train interpreters about how to use Listen Include Respect. Talking to them about accessible communication and easy to understand language was important to make sure everyone was included.

Cross-disability perspectives:

Another lesson was about working with cross-disability organisations. Cross-disability organisations usually do not have as much experience working with people with intellectual disabilities. This means that there is more for them to learn about inclusion - and the Listen Include Respect Guidelines can help them learn what to do. But it also means that if they have never given support before, they have fewer bad habits to break.

When organisations are new to working with self-advocates, they often know that they are not the experts so are open to listening to self-advocates and trying new things.

Friendly Barn wanted to learn about self-advocacy, but sometimes other cross-disability organisations do not, so self-advocates stay excluded.

It is important to give support to cross-disability federations to understand and use Listen Include Respect so they can represent everyone.



More information

The Listen Include Respect Guidelines were created by Inclusion International and Down Syndrome International. You can access resources on inclusive meetings, inclusive projects, inclusive hiring, and more through the Listen Include Respect how-tos, available for free online at www.listenincluderespect.com

Thank You

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