



Tips on running authentic and inclusive club nights for people with learning disabilities

A #NoBedtimes guide for organisers

What we love about inclusive club nights is that they create a great place for people to meet their friends, socialise and have fun. However, more and more seem to be starting at 6pm and ending at 9pm - some even earlier. There was a 'club night' advertised that finished at lunchtime, for example! Meanwhile, Stay Up Late was asked to publicise an event with the following message: *"No need to 'Stay Up Late' as it's in the daytime 2-4pm!"*

Why does a good night out have to stop at 9pm? By doing this we're allowing the bar to be set lower and lower for people with learning disabilities. This isn't just limited to clubbing, of course. It cuts across many life experiences - but this is just one area where we can try and change the way we think about things. We believe that people with learning disabilities should have the opportunity to stay up late, dance, snog, and drink (in whatever order they choose).

Nine steps to planning a great club night

To create a relaxed and welcoming environment that also feels like an authentic clubbing experience we've put together the following tips for organisers.

1. Find a decent venue

Bear in mind that if you're running a club night, your venue actually needs to feel like a club night venue. A local community centre may be cheap to hire but is a tatty hall covered in kids' drawings from the local play-group really the ideal place for giving people an authentic club night experience? There's a few things to think about when you're looking for a venue. Make

sure the venue itself is accessible and make sure the venue is easily accessible by public transport. Try and find somewhere that's central and not tucked out of the way. See if you can get a decent club venue for free. A venue which may be very quiet midweek may warm to the tantalising prospect of having 50+ paying guests in their premises!

2. Have transparent pricing

Some club nights let carers in free and others advertise a small charge. In reality this charge will most likely be passed on to the person with a learning disability so if you need to charge £5 just say so (rather than £4/carers £1). This is something we feel passionately about and would encourage everyone to adopt.

3. Dress the venue

Things like decent lighting and printed banners are important in giving people that authentic club night experience. This is especially so if it's a place where club nights/gigs are not the building's main purpose. You'll need to put effort into creating the right atmosphere.

4. Invest in quality publicity

Again, giving people that authentic club night experience is important here. Produce flyers that look like they are advertising a club night, not a village fete or a church jumble sale. Employing the services of a good graphic designer needn't cost the earth and will make all the difference when you publicise your events. It's also relatively cheap to get digitally-printed flyers produced.

5. Spend time on promotion

A club night won't be much fun if nobody turns up so you'll need to spend time building your mailing list. Gather addresses of local support providers, advocacy groups, carers' networks etc. and also think about places specific to your locality (student unions, colleges etc.). Being active on social media is vitally important, too. And just because you've been running for years with a decent attendance doesn't mean you stop advertising to get new people along. If club nights are to play a genuine role in tackling social isolation and building friendship networks they need a continued influx of new people, not simply the same old faces.

6. Ensure there's a proper bar

An inclusive club night is not a school disco. There is no reason not to be selling alcohol.

7. Have the nights led by people with learning disabilities

Try and make sure all aspects are run by people with learning disabilities from the DJs performing, running the door, helping to set up and pack away and providing visuals. Also make sure there are opportunities for people with learning disabilities to feed back on the nights and provide input on how they are run.

8. Create a culture that's all about dancing and having a good time

This means the organisers have a responsibility to create a fun-clubbing atmosphere, leading (and dancing!) by example. Also, make it clear that the role of support workers is not to sit on the edge looking bored, watching their phones but to be part of the action. The person they support may, of course, not want them dancing near them but that doesn't mean their enthusiasm won't rub off on other clubbers too.

9. Stay Up Late!

Our charity started because we wanted to promote the rights of people with learning disabilities to enjoy full and active social lives, and to get support providers to think differently and creatively about the way they support people. Organising an afternoon or early evening disco is about as far away from our

original vision as we can imagine, a truly 'medical model' response to the problem. Instead of changing the system we just expect people to conform to the existing system.

One of the reasons why we think these nights are important is that they help normalise night-time activities for people with learning disabilities. As a result, people can hopefully begin to feel confident about going to more mainstream nights out, and that the support they receive can adapt to that. Because many mainstream club nights and gigs often don't start until 9pm, by always having 'inclusive' nights finishing early they fail to help bring about that much-needed culture shift.

Stay Up Late's 10 o'clock challenge to club night organisers

Every night that we endorse on our events listings and social media will be ones that actively promote the right of people with learning disabilities to stay up late. We will only promote club nights that advertise that they end at least by 10pm. If there's a good reason (like the venue has a back to back booking) then we will make exceptions. In return anyone running a night that ends by at least 10pm can display the Stay Up Late logo on their event publicity if they want to.

We appreciate that this might annoy some good people putting on club nights but unless we take a stand on our worry is that events will get earlier and earlier and nights will get shorter and shorter.

Further information

Stay Up Late is a registered charity committed to promoting the rights of people with learning disabilities to live the lifestyle of their choosing.

Visit our website at www.stayuplate.org

Email us at info@stayuplate.org