It’s hard to be environmentally friendly when the world is ableist.

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# Context

[*Unseen*](https://extant.org.uk/productions/unseen) is the gripping new audio drama that examines the subtle and insidious effect of domestic abuse on the blind and visually impaired (VI) community. It is funded by the [Vision Foundation](https://www.visionfoundation.org.uk/our-impact/research-and-campaigns/the-unseen-report/) and based on their Unseen Report which highlights the inaccessibility of domestic abuse services to visually impaired people, even though disabled people are nearly three times more likely to experience domestic abuse than non-disabled people. The devising, rehearsal and recording process for *Unseen* took place in London due to the geographical restrictions (London only activity) put in place by the funder.

The purpose of Extant undertaking this environmental analysis is to track our carbon footprint data on this project, so we can use it as a baseline and compare it against future projects. As an Arts Council England funded national portfolio organisation, we are required to meet certain environmental and data tracking targets, which influence our environmental strategy and contribute to creating a robust action plan with realistic targets.

*Unseen* was devised, recorded, and released between October 2023 to March 2024. The stages of the project included:

* 1 online creative session.
* 4 free online creative workshops, open to VI and blind individuals with lived experience of domestic abuse.
* 12 days with a devising team in London.
* 3 rehearsal and recording days in London.
* 1 launch event in London.

*Unseen* launched online on 4th March 2024, and is free to access, anywhere and at any time via our website.

# The Team

Across the devising and recording team there were 21 blind and VI creative team members:

* 6 on the Devising Team,
* 1 Creative Lead/Director,
* 3 Workshop Facilitators,
* 1 Script Editor,
* 1 Sound Designer,
* 1 Assistant Producer,
* 9 Voice Actors,
* 5 Research Group Participants (there were some doubling of roles).

The team were intentionally recruited from across England and Wales. This is to ensure that VI talent was geographically representative and that we are providing development opportunities for VI people across the UK. There were also 6 sighted team members: Creative Producer (based in Derby), Sound Technician and 4 Access Workers (based in London)

# Environmental Impact

Using some of the Julie’s Bicycle tools, our carbon footprint total for the devising, rehearsing, recording and premiere of *Unseen* was 1.1 tonnes CO2e. We had a total of 9954 train journey miles, 213 tube journey miles and 54 nights of accommodation. An additional consideration with Extant (and when other disabled led companies are on tour) is that our cast/creative team are often accompanied by access support workers – which increases our costs and carbon footprint.

There is a severe lack of accessible accommodation in London and other cities across the UK and that which is available is more expensive. When attempting to book at a chain hotel there is often only one accessible room meaning we must split our team over multiple sites, increasing CO2 emissions and employing more access support workers.

# Reflections

Tracking our carbon footprint data with this project has been fundamental in allowing us to begin to audit our environmental impact. Setting a baseline for future Extant work, we can now start identifying areas to reduce our carbon footprint and set appropriate targets.

Due to the funding awarded and the geographical restrictions it had it would have been difficult to reduce our carbon footprint on this project.

Some of the early part of the project was held online alongside the creative workshop sessions as well as our final output - an online audio drama; this meant that participants and audiences could access it at their convenience, reducing audience travel and accommodation nights.

For the live launch event of *Unseen* in Camden, London, we invited London based disability and arts organisations, reduced the printing of programmes, and created QR code programmes (which linked to an online, digital, screen reader friendly programme). Our guest list was managed by name/organisation, thus avoiding printing and physical tickets and we produced a limited number of Braille copies of the programme for the audience, which were well received.

However, steps can now be made in terms of planning ahead for the future including:

* Booking local and accessible accommodation in advance.
* Sourcing creative teams in specific locations, whilst keeping in line with our artist development goals and ensuring that we continue to provide UK wide opportunities to VI artists.
* Sourcing rehearsal spaces that champion environmental sustainability and align with access requirements.

Being accessible and environmentally sustainable is not always possible because it is hard to be environmentally friendly when the world is ableist. Disabled people are more at risk of being excluded from climate action conversations and policies. Current policies also fail to consider the needs of disabled people and climate action cannot be effective unless disabled people are brought into the conversation.

Climate action with disabled people has begun with the launch of a [No Climate Action Without Us Toolkit](https://attitudeiseverything.org.uk/no-climate-action-without-us-toolkit/#read-toolkit) which presents research on how to make disabled people’s access to live events more environmentally sustainable.

# The Future - Unseen on Tour

In October 2024, *Unseen* will tour a live event to the Arena Theatre (Wolverhampton), The Lowry (Manchester), Bloomsbury Theatre (London) and host an online event.

Audience travel for festivals and gigs equates to 80% of event carbon emissions ([The Show Must Go on Report 2015](https://www.powerful-thinking.org.uk/resources/the-show-must-go-on-report/)) and in 2019/20 Chichester Festival Theatre calculated that 90% of their carbon footprint was generated by audience travel ([Cultural Hive](https://www.culturehive.co.uk/resources/audience-travel-and-carbon-offset/)).

However, the spread of the *Unseen* tour, across multiple venues in England, having back-to-back touring days and hosting one online will reduce the distance audiences and the creative team have to travel, creating a reduction in total travel emissions.

The theatre industry has gone back to a pre-covid mindset, with very few online shows available. Offering online events, ensures that disabled and immunosuppressed audiences can still experience theatre. Hosting an online event of *Unseen* reduces the need to travel and reduces our carbon footprint. This also provides cost effective savings for audiences as they don’t have to spend money on travel or accommodation.

# Extant and Environmental Reduction

The ways in which Extant could reduce environmental impact across its projects:

* Applying and using funding that is not restricted with its location.
* Rehearsing/devising where the most team members live.
* For touring productions, source local access workers, local technicians and engage with local sight loss and arts organisations and visually impaired audiences to attend.
* Working with other disability arts organisations to find solutions in reducing carbon emissions that involve accessible methods.