

We need Pride events that are accessible for ALL

DIVA explores the obstacles facing disabled and neurodivergent queer people this Pride **BY ELLA GAUCI**

A Pride march should be a space of joy. Rainbow flags billowing up high. Thousands of people chanting in unison about the power of love. Dogs wearing rainbow bandanas. But for Emily Garside (she/they), events like Pride pose one major problem. Where are the toilets?

Emily, who is autistic and has a chronic illness called ulcerative colitis, finds that just attending Pride can feel like a huge gamble. “At Cardiff Pride, I have huge anxiety about toilet access,” she explains. “My chronic illness means that’s really important. Every year it’s impossible to find a toilet on the march route unless you can make use of a shop or cafe, which in hugely busy events is near impossible. Cardiff Pride has its toilets inside the paid-for Pride event, but not near the parade route.”

Nearly a quarter of the UK’s population has a disability. According to the ONS, 32.4% of young people who identified as LGB+ were also part of the disabled community. So why is it that our Pride events are still largely not accessible or inclusive to the disabled community?

Francesca Romana Ammaturo (she/her) is a senior lecturer in sociology and international relations at London Metropolitan University. She is also a disabled lesbian and spoke to

60 Pride organisers around the world about accessibility for her upcoming research project.

“A lack of designated quiet spaces can make Pride anything but a celebration”

“Very often, parades or marches are very long, and they do not offer the opportunity to rest or break out to use facilities,” Francesca explains. “Moreover, there is an important issue relating to sensorial stimulation and the presence of big crowds during these events. Some organisers have ‘quiet zones’ when people can go and decompress if they are experiencing a sensory overload or want to break away from big crowds.”

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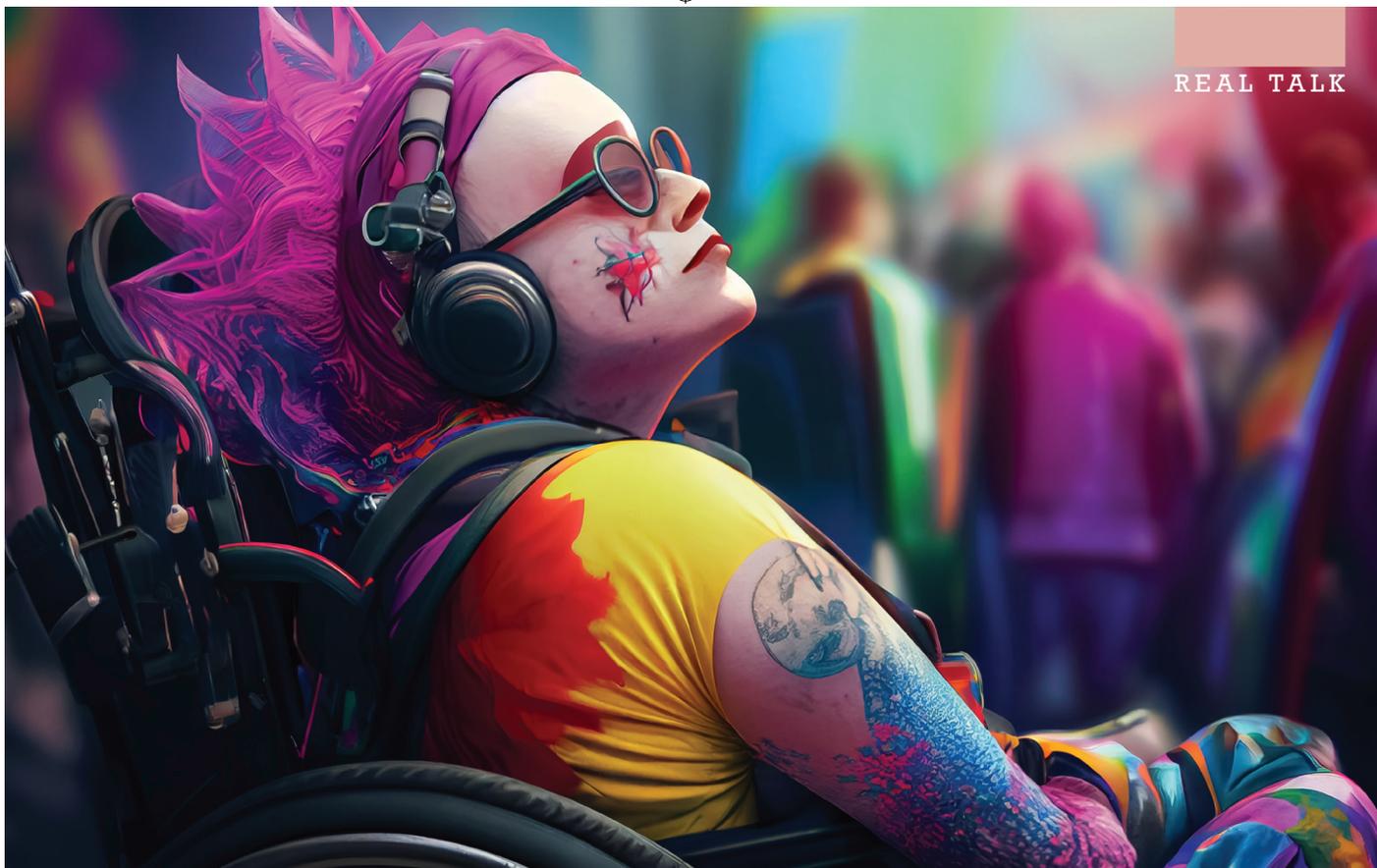


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Every summer, thousands of people flock to Pride parades, parties and events to celebrate the LGBTQIA community. More often than not, these events involve loud noises, flashing lights, overcrowded spaces, and sometimes lots of drunken singing. For CJ DeBarra (they/them), a non-binary queer author and journalist, going to events like this at Pride isn't an option. "As a neurodivergent person, I do find Pride completely overwhelming so I often dip out," they explain. "My partner, who is also neurodivergent, cannot attend the march at all, because it can cause meltdowns and makes them deeply uncomfortable. I have attended with-out them because we literally can't go together."

In recent years, Pride events across the world have been making strides in areas such as prioritising safety and questioning Pride's environmental impact. But in pushing forward with some of these developments, the disabled community can feel overlooked.

"A crucial issue here is the question of so-called 'eco-ableism' that may impact inclusion policies for disabled people," Francesca continues. "For instance, Pride organisers are increasingly wanting to get rid of vehicles at Pride parades or to use electric vehicles. The question then becomes: how is this going to negatively impact

the mobility requirements of LGBTQIA disabled people? How can we be environmentally sustainable without asking LGBTQIA people to bear the brunt of these practices?"

Events like Pride offer a number of unique obstacles for members of the disabled community. Everything from uneven march routes to a lack of designated quiet spaces can make Pride anything but a celebration. So how can we do better?

"Seek disabled and neurodivergent LGBTQIA people out," CJ says. "You need a decent split of people from different communities. While many committees are volunteer-led, ask yourself why you aren't getting disabled or neurodivergent volunteers. The input is valuable and can change the way you assume Pride should look."

For people who have disabilities,

inclusion is not just about adapting pre-existing events at Pride. It's about creating new spaces with the disabled community in mind.

"A huge part of accessibility is respecting and understanding that for many the 'traditional' spaces of Pride – pubs and clubs – will never be accessible to many," Emily adds. "It's not about just making those spaces accessible but also offering alternatives. Whether that's sober spaces, more open spaces, less crowded spaces... or just alternatives. Access doesn't just look like making what you already have 'best fit' for disabled people. It's also offering spaces that we might prefer to be in." **D**

Follow CJ DeBarra [@cjdebarra](#) or buy their book *NeuroQueer: A Neurodivergent Guide To Love, Sex, And Everything In Between*.

How to make Pride events more accessible

Top tips from Francesca Romana Ammatturo

1 Consult disabled people on their needs.

3 Always provide captioning or interpretation for events.

5 Invest money in making Pride accessible.

2 Have a mobility plan that includes disabled people and gives them the option to use the service.

4 Organise quiet spaces for sensory decompression.

6 Train staff and volunteers to be disability aware/positive.