

Entrant company name: **Sanctuary**

Entry title: **Behind the Mask - Disability History Month**

Category: **Best Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Campaign or Initiative**

Behind the Mask

A powerful, colleague led campaign transforming Disability History Month into an organisational cultural shift, driving empathy and inclusion through authentic experiences, a travelling creative exhibition and engagement across Sanctuary's 14,000 people.

1) Brief, objectives and budget

Challenge

Sanctuary's Disability Network identified 'masking', where disabled and neurodivergent people hide or suppress symptoms or behaviours, causing anxiety about disclosure, a barrier to inclusion and limiting understanding across teams.

The campaign aimed to increase psychological safety, build empathy and support more equitable systems around workplace adjustments.

Organisational alignment

Inclusion for All is our diversity and inclusion strategy. It sets out how we plan to achieve our goal of being a diverse and inclusive organisation where our people thrive and meet our customers' needs with fairness and empathy.

Objectives

- Grow Disability Network membership and participation.
- Increase reach and participation in Disability History Month (DHM).
- Build understanding and empathy for masking through lived experience.
- Create conditions that encourage disclosure and support improved adjustments.

Budget

Delivered for ,£1,100 using in-house design, production and project management. Costs covered exhibition curation, materials and couriering. Staff time not costed.

2) Insight, research and planning

The equity problem

Around 25% of people nationally live with a disability or long-term condition. Internally, only 6% disclosed pre-campaign, signalling under-reporting and unmet need.

Audience insight

We identified three key colleague segments:

- Maskers (fear judgement)
- Managers (willing to support but not always confident)
- Influencers (leaders and network champions)

Success required psychological safety, accessible formats for dispersed colleagues and visible leadership support.

Planning approach

Using the AMEC outputs > outtakes > outcomes framework, we blended lived experience, inclusive design, leadership advocacy and robust ethics (guidance, consent, right-to-withdraw).

3) Strategy, creativity and innovation

Strategic idea

'Behind the Mask' reframed masking as a shared, human experience. The campaign centred on colleague voices and creativity rather than top-down messaging.

Key levers

- Culture: Artwork and stories humanised masking.
- Systems: Clear adjustments pathways; aligned with People team's 2026 colleague reporting programmes.
- Skills: Explainers and conversation prompts for teams.

Creative execution

- Bold visual identity across a touring exhibition (key employee hubs in London, Worcester, Hull, Glasgow, Stratford, Telford) and digital gallery for equitable access.
- Multi-format content: videos, case studies, Sway gallery, Teams backgrounds, QR-linked posters and weekly Viva Engage stories.
- Accessibility built in: captions, transcripts, alt text, plain English, easy-read summaries and high-contrast assets.

Innovation

We elevated DHM from a single webinar into a co-created cultural moment that reached colleagues across multiple settings, inviting reflection and participation at scale.

4) Implementation

Phase 1 - Build (Aug-Oct 25)

Call for submissions; contributor support and consent; Disability Network outreach led by executive sponsor Nathan Warren (himself a wheelchair user); exhibition and digital gallery development.

Phase 2 - Launch (Nov 25)

DHM and International Day of Persons with Disabilities (IDPD) launch across channels; executive sponsor messaging; brand assets shared; explainers published. Exhibition opened with leadership preview attended by Kate Nash OBE from disability advocate group Purple Space; digital gallery launched for remote workers.

Phase 3 - Tour and dialogue (Nov-Dec 25)

Exhibition visited Worcester (IDPD coffee morning with mask-making creativity session), Hull Customer Hub, Glasgow office and the Care Managers' Conference. Weekly stories featured colleague experiences; leaders facilitated local conversations. Colleagues' Choice vote encouraged participation and thoughtful reflection on the pieces submitted.

Phase 4 - Legacy (Dec 25-Jan 26)

Exhibition prizes announced; wrap-up storytelling; final exhibition at Rose Manor engaged Supported Living colleagues. Campaign aligned with People Team's 2026 adjustments and manager capability programme.

Ethics and governance

Lived-experience review; safeguarding checklist; right to withdraw; consent forms; guidance to ensure sensitive framing; alt text and captions.

5) Measurement, evaluation and impact

Outputs - reach and participation

27 creative submissions - painting and photography, poetry, sculpture - and eight personal case studies

71,263 total views; 9,044 engagements; 74 shares

1,590 attendees/participants (2024 baseline: 272 webinar views)

Endorsement by Kate Nash OBE from disability advocacy group Purple Space

Highest-performing posts:

CEO preview: 1,974 views / 72 engagements

LinkedIn hero: 6,672 / 4,756

Multiple storyline posts reaching 100+ reactions

Outtakes - awareness, empathy, confidence

Colleague quotes show meaningful cognitive and emotional shifts:

"I didn't expect to be so moved."

"I had no idea of the daily struggles some of my colleagues face."

"I feel very lucky to talk openly about my condition."

"I've never seen anything like this before in Sanctuary."

These demonstrate greater empathy, reflection and psychological safety.

Outcomes - behaviour and system change

Disclosure rose from 6% to 8% (+33% uplift), enabling better workplace support.

Disability Network membership increased 165 to 228 (+38%).

DHM participation grew 5.8x, from 272 to 1,590.

Surge in colleague-generated stories and leadership advocacy indicated organisation-wide cultural resonance.

Value for money

Delivered on ,£1,100, using internal expertise and volunteer support. Cost per participant significantly below typical engagement campaigns. No AVEs used.

Learning and legacy

- Story-first, multi-format engagement outperformed previous approaches, normalising conversations about disability and masking across roles and regions.
- A clear need was identified for enhanced manager capability around adjustments and disability confidence. The People team has initiated a 2026 programme to improve inclusion data and support.
- A first-year baseline for awareness and disclosure was established to track long-term EDI progress.

Why this entry should win

It addresses a real equity barrier with measurable change. Masking is a hidden systemic challenge. The campaign drove behavioural outcomes, increasing disclosure and network membership.

It turned DHM into a cultural movement. A touring exhibition and digital gallery brought inclusion into everyday spaces, from care homes to customer hubs.

It is ethically exemplary and genuinely accessible. Consent, safeguarding, captions, alt text and inclusive design were embedded from concept to delivery.

It demonstrates leadership and grassroots ownership. Senior advocacy and colleague-generated stories created the psychological safety needed for sustainable EDI impact.

It delivers lasting, organisation-wide value. On a ,£1,100 budget, the campaign catalysed cultural and system change, underpinning ongoing work on adjustments and disability inclusion.

Behind the Mask shows how ethical, human storytelling can unlock disclosure, strengthen support and move Sanctuary closer to Inclusion for All, where colleagues thrive and customers receive fair, empathetic service.