

A Real-Life Design Challenge for Emily Carr Students

by Lisa Boulton and Eugenie Cheon

In the fall of 2019, DABC contacted the Health Design Lab at Emily Carr University with a unique idea for design students—to apply their talents in communication design to the voices connected to DABC.

We were excited by this opportunity to connect 16 third-year Communication Design students with people living with visible and invisible disabilities to make design recommendations to DABC.

The idea was to imagine how to navigate to and around the new DABC office in downtown Vancouver.

Over the course of the semester, students led by Professor Eugenie

Cheon, worked with staff, volunteers and clients of DABC in a series of co-creative workshops. We hoped to shift perceptions of disability, so our young designers saw people with disabilities as the experts in, and advocates for, their experiences.

In a series of three co-creative workshops, six teams of design students partnered with the DABC participants. Each team created unique creative activities for these events, aiming to build relationships through shared storytelling and develop insights into what is supporting and hindering people's participation in their community.

During the last workshop, one of the teams explored what an ideal

space would look like for DABC. The team first delved deep into what makes up the DABC community, by creating personas. They then took each persona on a journey through various scenarios to gain insight on what type of elements would be helpful, useful or even playful in an ideal DABC space.

Visual and tangible props were used to stimulate different senses and act as prompts to assist people in generating ideas and recalling past experiences.

One of the core insights gained from this particular activity was that DABC is more than just a place that provides professional assistance. It is a community that values playfulness and human connection.



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Design recommendations, along with individual learning and reflection, were captured in visual essays and shared with the DABC community.

Throughout the project, Emily Carr's Design students gained rich experience in being empathetic designers. Third year communication design student, Vannysha Chang, described her experience.

"In each co-creation session, our team had the pleasure of getting to know our DABC representative, Salina who showed us the importance of community, playfulness and professionalism. The stories that we heard gave us valuable insight and inspired us to form a set of design recommendations—which will hopefully lead to the creation of a space that supports DABC's work and fosters meaningful interactions between members of the community."

Professor Eugenie Cheon commented on the collaboration with DABC.

"Engaging with the DABC to study its space, and the everyday context lived by its community, was a

meaningful and valuable learning experience each step of the way. The co-creative workshops were an incredible opportunity for students to grow as empathetic designers and to think and apply the values of design. We were inspired by the stories told and challenged by the wisdom, knowledge and resilience of the DABC community.

"I hope to see this partnership grow, where we continue to create positive social impact together."

LISA BOULTON IS THE MANAGER AT HEALTH DESIGN LAB, EMILY CARR UNIVERSITY. EUGENIE CHEON IS A PROFESSOR AT THE UNIVERSITY. **T**



"Since DABC was making the transition to a new office, it seemed like the perfect time to start a conversation on accessibility in relation to space and design," said **Myung Lee, DABC Accessibility Project Manager**. "We wanted to gather ideas from staff, volunteers and clients who are going to use the new space and interact with DABC.

"Through this project, we hoped participants would recognize the potential of inclusive design to empower individuals, create positive experiences, build strong communities and transform the face of DABC.

We have completed this first partnership, but we look forward to working with ECUAD on future projects!"