# Making your activities and events accessible

How to remove barriers and make sure disabled people can participate in your group's events and activities

This information was written by members of Scope's Local People's Programme (LPP)[1] in collaboration with the Resource Centre. Scope's LPP were a group of local people campaigning for disability equality in Brighton and Hove.

There is a lot of detail on these pages, and the practical points are outlined first, before some of the background thinking is explained. It will be useful for every group to read through all of the information, but every point might not be relevant for smaller groups or smaller events. The contents of this information sheet are:

[1] https://www.scope.org.uk/partners/peoples-health-trust/

# What is accessibility?

Accessibility is all about removing barriers to participation. Identifying and removing barriers creates equality and offers disabled people more independence, choice and control.

# Start where you are: Top tips for improving access

This guide will help you make a start in removing barriers at your events. Our tips may also be useful when thinking about your group's meetings and other activities. It may also get you interested in the world of disability politics and culture.

A proactive, informed approach and an inclusive, inviting attitude makes events attractive to disabled people, even if physical access isn't perfect. If you can't make expensive structural adaptations to a building, there is always something else you can do to improve accessibility.

When thinking about access you need to consider:

- Physical barriers such as stairs, lack of seating, or small, non-adapted toilets;
- Communication barriers such as access information not being available online, a lack of British Sign Language (BSL) interpretation, unnecessarily complex language, and visually confusing publicity;
- Attitudinal barriers such as group members' misunderstanding of disabled people's needs, or perceptions that people with disabilities are "not normal" or "not one of us".

## Removing physical barriers

### 1. Try to host your event in a physically accessible venue

As a starting point, this means step-free access, reserved seating for those less able to stand and disabled toilets, but an access audit can help you identify all the barriers. Accessible venues can be difficult to find in Brighton but are worth the effort. Our suggestions for central Brighton meeting and events spaces are: Possability Place, Brighthelm Centre, Friends Meeting House, YHA Brighton, or for a more informal setting, Al Campo Lounge. If you can't use one of these, ask your current venue about improving access.

### 2. Make sure you have ramped access and accessible toilets

Ramped access enables wheelchair users to get around the building. The Resource Centre has ramps that can be hired free of charge[2], and guidance about how to use them. If you don't have an accessible toilet, you can hire one for the day from a portaloo company and station it outside your venue.

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[2] https://www.resourcecentre.org.uk/equipment/ramps

### 3. Provide free tickets for personal assistants

If your event charges an entry fee, provide Personal Assistant (PA) tickets at no additional cost. It is best practice to provide PA tickets on trust, without requiring evidence such as receipt of disability benefits.

### 4. Create a breakout space

Designate a comfortable, quiet space where people can go if they are getting overstimulated or tired. Ideally this will be a separate room, with sofas or floor cushions, and low lighting. You might also want to provide ear defenders, and some "stim toys". These are toys that help regulate the nervous system, designed for use by people with autism, ADHD, and/or anxiety.

### 5. Provide relaxed performances

If your event is quite large and includes multiple performances, designate some of them as "relaxed". Relaxed performances are laid back about noise and movement from the audience during an event and can be more accessible to people with learning disabilities and autism.

## Removing communication barriers

### 1. General principles

You can reach disabled audiences by following these general points, which have been adapted from course material by Attitude Is Everything[3]:

- Plan your outreach in good time, not at the last minute
- Use positive, clear language
- Promote any access provision you have
- Make it easy to find information and get hold of tickets
- Make early contact with local relevant organisations run by and for disabled people
- Contact your local authority equalities officer and/or community development officer
- Keep in mind the goal of reaching disabled audiences, rather than impressing non-disabled people with your access provision.

### 2. Provide detailed but concise access information

Access information allows people to decide for themselves if the event is accessible to them. The basic information you need to provide is:

a) Is there step-free access? Simply say "step-free access" or explain the situation e.g. "event upstairs with no lift"

b) Is there an accessible toilet? Simply say "accessible toilet available" or, if not, "no accessible toilet available, nearest one is at [insert location]"

c) Can people request free tickets for personal assistants? If yes, explain how to do this.

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[3] https://attitudeiseverything.org.uk/ These points have been adapted from guidance provided by Disability Equality for the Live Event Industry Training

d) If the event includes a performance, is it possible to have a seated view of the stage? If yes, explain what people will need to do to get a seat e.g. email in advance, or tell a volunteer on the day.

Provide a few different ways to get in touch if somebody has an access query. For larger groups and events, aim to have a dedicated email address and phone number for access queries which is checked by a person who is disability-informed.

## 3. Use Clear Print guidelines for printed material

Clear Print guidelines improve readability for a wide range of people and reduce the need for alternative formats. These guidelines are:

- Use a minimum font size of 12pt, ideally 14pt.
- Use a font that is easy to read. This usually means one that is sans serif, such as Arial or Helvetica, and avoid italics.
- Ensure there is at least one space between the lines.
- Make all text left aligned.
- Avoid breaking words across lines (hyphenating).
- Avoid text over images.

In some cases, it might be useful to provide your written material in alternative formats, such as large print, Braille, Easy Read, British Sign Language or audio description. The UK Government has a useful online guide[4] which explains what these alternative formats are, when they might be useful, and how to create them.

## 4. Make your website accessible

If your group has a website, make sure it is accessible to people who use assistive technologies such as screen readers and magnifiers. If you have created a website yourselves, the UK Government has some useful guidance for doing a basic accessibility check[5]. If you have a professionally designed website, ask your developer to make sure your website complies with WCAG 2.0, the internationally agreed guidelines developed by the Web Accessibility Initiative[6].

## 5. Follow best practice guidelines for social media posts

- Use image descriptions (also called alt text);
- Create subtitles for videos;
- Use Camel Case for hashtags #LikeThis not #likethis;
- Make content warnings for potentially disturbing content

## 6. Use equipment or interpreters to improve d/Deaf inclusion

Depending on what is appropriate for your event, you could:

- Use an infra-red hearing system or induction loop. These are available to borrow for free from the Resource Centre.

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[4] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/inclusive-communication/accessible-communication-formats

[5] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/doing-a-basic-accessibility-check-if-you-cant-do-a-detailed-one

[6] https://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG20/

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- Caption lyrics or speech on a laptop or using a projector
- Use a PA system to amplify voices
- Offer British Sign Language (BSL) interpretation. If you are based in Sussex, you can find professional interpreters at Sussex Interpreters Direct[7]

# Removing attitudinal barriers

## 1. Learn about disability

If you are a larger group, you could organise disability awareness training for your group with a provider such as Freeney Williams[8], or Speak Out[9] for learning disability specific training. If you are a small group without money to hire someone to deliver training, then you could start a reading group with this information sheet or some of the resources listed at the end.

## 2. Be open and honest

Be transparent about what you can and can't offer. If you have level access, but no disabled loo, then say so. Avoid using terms like, 'fully accessible', or not including any information at all if access is bad. Ask for feedback from disabled people in your community as you learn about accessibility. If you make a mistake, apologise directly to those who were affected, and let them know what you're going to do to follow up.

## 3. Be led by disabled people

Be led by those most affected by any particular issue and support disabled people in your groups to take the lead in making decisions which affect them. Lived experience of disability is a special kind of expertise and this approach will lead to the most useful outcomes. Encourage non-disabled people in your groups to help implement decisions and stay involved.

## 4. Think about language

Use up-to-date language and follow the lead of the disabled people in your community when choosing words to represent them. Some terms which have been reclaimed may not be appropriate for a non-disabled person to use. If in doubt, ask people what language they prefer to describe themselves and remember that people have different preferences about language.

## 5. Normalise disability

Normalise disability by making asking about access needs a routine part of your communications when advertising events, or inducting new people into your group. Remember that many people have invisible disabilities, or that those with visible disabilities may have different needs than you might assume. Informed by the social model of disability, focus on asking about access needs, rather than expecting people to disclose details about their impairments.

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[7] https://www.sussexinterpretersdirect.com/

[8] https://www.freeneywilliams.com/services.html

[9] https://www.bhspeakout.org.uk/training-and-consultation/awareness-training/

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## 6. Learn about Disability Justice

Disability Justice is a framework that examines disability and ableism as it relates to other forms of oppression and identity. For more information about disability justice, check out the Disability Justice Primer[10] written by Sins Invalid, or the 10 Principles of Disability Justice[11].

# Accessibility checklists and audits

When assessing your access provision, it's a good idea to use a checklist to make sure you haven't overlooked anything. For meetings and grassroots events with a smaller budget, Sisters of Frida have created a useful checklist that is available on their website[12]. For larger events with tickets, vendors and performers, look at the selection of guides by Attitude Is Everything[13] and find the one that is most relevant for your event.

If you are a group that uses a regular venue, you might also want to get a professional access audit. This can help you spot any access issues you might have overlooked. It will give you a clear record of where you are at, and the improvements you can look to make. It's great to find someone from the local disabled community to do this for you, but avoid asking people to do this kind of work for free.

# Accessibility equipment from the Resource Centre

Community groups in Brighton and Hove can borrow the following accessibility equipment from the Resource Centre. It is free to use, but your group will need to book in advance[14].

## Portable ramps

Two portable, lightweight, folding ramps are available: one is 2ft long and the other is 4ft long. Both can be transported easily in the boot of a car. These are useful for events where there is a single step at the entrance or somewhere within the venue. Having a ramp instead of a step can be helpful for people with buggies, people who use walking frames, and people with sight impairments, as well as wheelchair users.

## Induction loops and infra-red hearing system

Induction loops and infra-red hearing systems can help make your events more accessible for hearing aid users.

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[10] https://www.sinsinvalid.org/disability-justice-primer

[11] https://www.sinsinvalid.org/blog/10-principles-of-disability-justice

[12] https://www.sisofrida.org/resources/sisters-of-fridas-accessibility-guide-to-meetings-and-events-a-toolkit/

[13] https://attitudeiseverything.org.uk/industry/all-of-our-resources/

[14] https://www.resourcecentre.org.uk/equipment

Induction loops are loops of cable that are placed around the edge of the room where your meeting or event is taking place. People speaking inside the loop are picked up by microphones and their voices are amplified for people whose hearing aids are set to the T-position. One main induction loop is available for events; and one smaller, portable induction loop is available for one-to-one work.

The infra-red hearing system is designed for use in small, inside meetings or events where people are seated in a circle or round a table. It uses infra-red beams to enhance sound quality, and can be used by up to 5 hearing aid users at the same time. Other equipment

The Resource Centre also hires out other items of equipment at low cost. Other items that might be useful for improving accessibility include PA systems and projectors.

# Why does access matter?

Disabled people make up a fifth of the UK's population, but are noticeably absent from public life. Because of inaccessibility and social stigma, people with disabilities face additional barriers to participation in work and social life. They experience higher rates of unemployment and poverty, and are more likely to be socially isolated.

Under the Equality Act 2010 and the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, disabled people have some protections under the law, but still need non-disabled people to be proactive about inclusion. Working to improve accessibility in your group is one of the best ways you can contribute to changing this, and it is likely to have a direct impact in your community.

# Disabilities are diverse

In the UK, a person is legally defined as disabled if they have an impairment which has a substantial and long-term impact on their ability to carry out day-to-day activities[15]. It is important to remember that not all disabilities are visible, and people with a range of different access needs may want to come to your group and events. They may be:
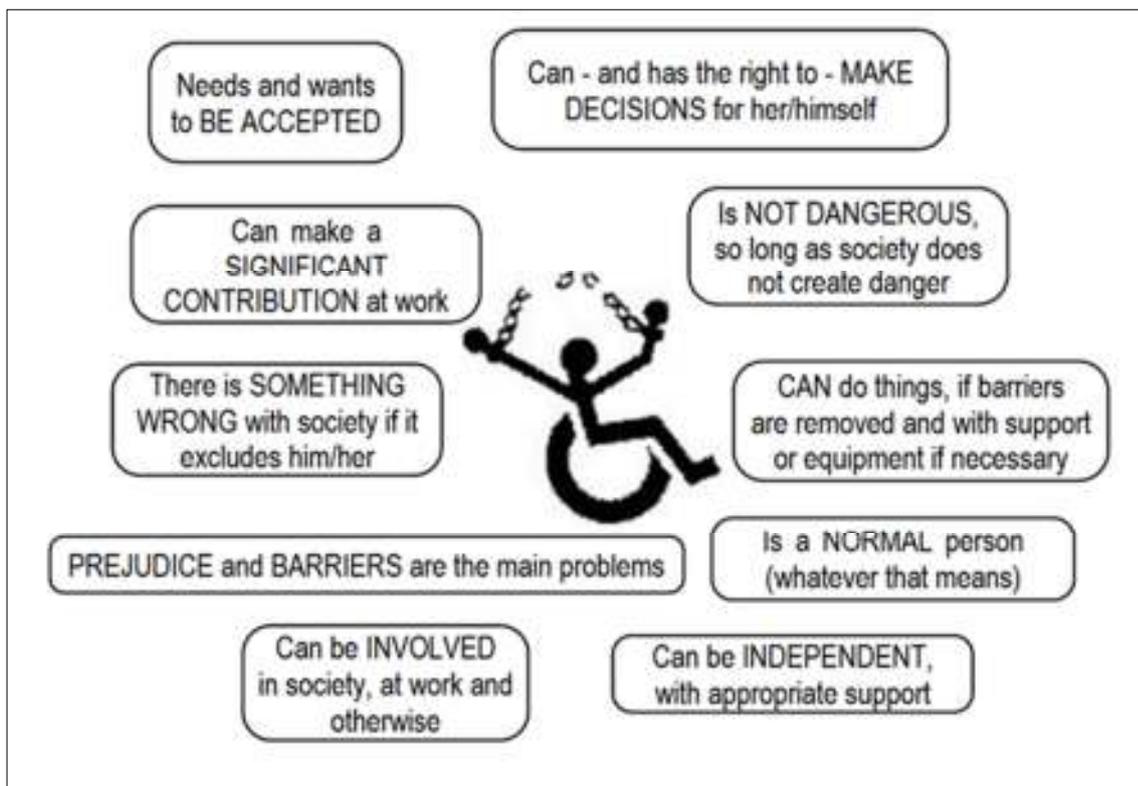
- Wheelchair users
- People with mobility impairments
- Visually impaired people
- Hard of hearing people
- D/deaf people
- People with non-visible impairments
- People with learning disabilities
- People with mental health conditions
- People with conditions such as cancer, HIV, or chronic fatigue syndrome

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[15] https://www.gov.uk/definition-of-disability-under-equality-act-2010

When working to include disabled people, it's important to remember to ask about their access needs, rather than their diagnoses or health, which is personal information they may or may not wish to disclose.

# The social model of disability

The social model of disability, in contrast to the dominant medical model, says that people are largely disabled by barriers in society, not by their impairment or difference. Barriers can be physical, like buildings not having accessible toilets, or they can be caused by people's attitudes to difference, like assuming disabled people can't do certain things.



Needs and wants to BE ACCEPTED

Can - and has the right to - MAKE DECISIONS for her/himself

Can make a SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTION at work

Is NOT DANGEROUS, so long as society does not create danger

There is SOMETHING WRONG with society if it excludes him/her

CAN do things, if barriers are removed and with support or equipment if necessary

PREJUDICE and BARRIERS are the main problems

Is a NORMAL person (whatever that means)

Can be INVOLVED in society, at work and otherwise

Can be INDEPENDENT, with appropriate support

The social model of disability (image by the Trades Union Congress)

# The Equality Act 2010 and reasonable adjustments

The Equality Act 2010 legally protects disabled people from discrimination. Discrimination may be overt and deliberate, or it might be indirect and structural. For example, the failure to make reasonable adjustments for a disabled person's access needs is legally classed as discrimination.

Your group – even if it is a small group – has a legal duty to reduce, remove and prevent barriers to participation for disabled people. This means anticipating access needs, as well as responding to barriers as they arise. If you are a small group, keep talking with your members (and potential members) about their needs and making your activities as accessible as you can.

If you are a larger group, or running a public event, you might need to think in terms of "reasonable adjustments". These are adjustments that might need to be made in order to remove or reduce any disadvantage faced by a disabled service-user, volunteer, or worker as the result of their disability. An adjustment is considered reasonable if it is effective, practical, financially appropriate, and safe. The Equality and Human Rights Commission has some clear and helpful guidance on their website about disability discrimination and reasonable adjustments[16].

If your group feels you can't meet a specific access-related request, best practice is to offer a range of alternative options which might solve the problem. Try to think of ways to say yes before you say no. For example, it may not be possible for you to install a lift in the building you use, but you could find an alternative meeting space. It's important to note that legally, costs for adjustments should never be passed on to a disabled person.

To clarify what is needed and appropriate, talk with your current and prospective members about their access needs. If necessary, seek out expert advice from someone trained in access auditing. Treating access as a standard part of your group's planning, rather than an add-on, will help disability to become normalised in your group.

# More information

The following resources are useful for learning more about disability culture in general and best practices for accessibility:

- Attitude is Everything - www.attitudeiseverything.org.uk
- Sisters of Frida - www.sisofrida.org
- Sins Invalid - www.sinsinvalid.org/disability-justice-primer
- Scope - www.scope.org.uk
- Tourette's Hero - www.touretteshero.com
- Disability Arts Online – www.disabilityarts.online
- The Equality and Human Rights Commission - www.equalityhumanrights.com
- Shape Arts - www.shapearts.org.uk/Listing/Category/resources
- Bodies in Translation – www.bodiesintranslation.ca
- Disability Visibility Project – www.disabilityvisibilityproject.com
- Access is Love - www.disabilityintersectionalitysummit.com/access-is-love

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[16] https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/advice-and-guidance/disability-discrimination