

Disability and Volunteering

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1. The Disability Discrimination Act

The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995 aims to end the discrimination that many disabled people face. This Act has been significantly extended, including by the Disability Discrimination Act 2005. It now gives disabled people rights in the areas of:

- employment
- education
- access to goods, facilities and services, including larger private clubs and land-based transport services
- buying or renting land or property, including making it easier for disabled people to rent property and for tenants to make disability-related adaptations
- functions of public bodies, for example issuing of licences

The Act requires public bodies to promote equality of opportunity for disabled people. It also allows the government to set minimum standards so that disabled people can use public transport easily.

What is a disability?

Disability does not just mean someone who uses a wheelchair. The DDA defines disability as a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on a person's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.

This is a wide definition and can include:

- People who are blind or partially sighted, or deaf or hard of hearing, or who have heart conditions.
- People with epilepsy, or who have problems with continence, people who have insulin-dependent diabetes, or who have a learning disability.

- People with Down's syndrome, or with dyslexia, or who have arthritis.
- People who have mental health problems, or are wheelchair users, or have restricted height.

A normal day to day activity: this is something which is carried out by most people on a fairly regular and frequent basis, such as washing, eating, catching a bus or turning on a television. It does not mean something as individual as playing a musical instrument to a professional standard or doing everything involved in a particular job.

The person must be affected in at least one of the respects listed in the DDA:

- mobility;
- manual dexterity;
- physical coordination;
- continence;
- ability to lift, carry or otherwise move everyday objects;
- speech, hearing or eyesight;
- memory or ability to concentrate, learn or understand; or
- Perception of risk of physical danger.

If the effects of the disability are reduced by medication or other treatment then the relevant effects are those that would be present if there was no medication or treatment taking place. There is an exception to this rule for people who wear spectacles or contact lenses, then the relevant effects are those that remain while the spectacles or contact lenses are being used.

Special provisions cover particular conditions which might otherwise not be considered as disabilities. These are provisions covering:

- recurring or fluctuating conditions such as arthritis, where the effects can sometimes be less than substantial, which are treated as continuing to have a substantial adverse effect so long as that effect is likely to recur;
- conditions which progressively deteriorate, such as motor neurone disease, which count as having a substantial adverse effect from the first time they have any effect on the ability to carry out normal day to day activities even if it is not substantial, so long as there is eventually likely to be a substantial adverse effect;
- severe disfigurements, which are treated as having substantial adverse effects on the ability to carry out normal day to day activities, even if they have no actual effect at all.

Further information can be found at : <http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/>

2. What do you know about disabled people?

It is assumed...

- Disabled people are the minority group – according to the Disability Discrimination Act, 25% of the population are disabled.
- You can see disabled people – over 50% of disabled people have hidden impairments.
- Disabled people are born with their conditions – over 70% acquire their condition
- A guide dog user cannot see – 89% of blind people have useful vision
- Lifts and ramps are the critical adjustment for disabled people – over 90% of people using wheelchairs are also independently mobile
- British Sign Language is the Deaf Communities version of English – BSL is a visual language
- People with dyslexia cannot read or spell – pastel coloured paper may enable someone with dyslexia to read the text

Facts and Figures

In London:

- The total number of people living in Greater London is 7,172,091. - Office for National Statistics 2001 Census.
- The London Health Commission estimates that disabled Londoners make up over 20% of our population - 1,434,418.
- The 2001 Census reports that there are 242,408 “permanently sick or disabled” in London between aged 16-74, which calculates to 3.38% of that sector of the London population.
- According to the Disability Rights Commission, 2003, there are roughly 8.5 million disabled people in Britain – one in seven of the population
- In a survey of over 8,100 households by the Greater London Authority in 2003, 20% were found to include a disabled person.
- 8,945,000 in the UK have a hearing related condition or have BSL as a first language
- 8% of Londoners aged 16-24 are disabled

- 38% of Londoners aged 55 to retirement age are disabled people
- Disabled women are a slightly higher percentage than disabled men
- People from black and ethnic minority groups are more likely to be disabled than people from white groups.

In Camden:

- 31,287 (15.8%) people have a Limiting Long-Term Illness (2001 Census)
- 6,625 people claiming Disability Living Allowance (August 2000)
- 3,005 people claiming Attendance Allowance (May 2000)

3. Barriers Faced By Disabled People

Barriers, which prevent disabled people from playing their full part in society, have been grouped into three main forms: attitudinal, environmental and organisational.

Attitudinal barriers

Attitudinal barriers occur when people: make assumptions about disabled people, act on stereotypes, fail to treat disabled people equally, go along with the 'society of perfection'.

Environmental barriers

For example: barriers that prevent the free movement of disabled people, free physical access to buildings, or equal access to services.

Organisational or institutional barriers

Examples might include: policies and procedures which do not take into account disabled people's individual capabilities, or are designed for the 'smooth-running' of a business and not disabled people's use of the service, or unthinkingly applied.

4. Disability Etiquette

Language

Use the terms disabled person or person with an impairment, not handicap; this word comes from the 14th century horse racing term 'handicap' when horses were 'weighted down' to give competition a sporting chance.

A person is not a condition, so avoid referring to an individual by the condition they have. A person with arthritis is not an "arthritic" or someone with cerebral palsy is not a "spastic". In addition, it is important to realise that medical labels do not reflect what a person can do or how the environment disables them.

Avoid using the word "disabled" as a noun - "The Disabled". It implies a homogenous group separate from the rest of society. Disabled people are not a group separate from society.

Avoid attaching labels to people with or without impairments. For example, the word "normal" has no real meaning, as we all are different.

Never use:

Victim - use person who has, person with, person who has experienced

Cripple - use disabled person, person with an impairment

Crippled By - use person who has, person with

Suffering From - use person who has, person with

Afflicted By - use person who has, person with

Wheelchair Bound - use wheelchair user, person who uses a wheelchair

Mental Handicap - use person with a learning disability

Deaf & Dumb - use person who is deaf without speech

The Disabled - use disabled people

Able Bodied – Use non-disabled person

Person with a disability – Use disabled person

A disability – Use condition, impairment or illness

Avoid: pitiful, poor, unfortunate, tragic, deserving and so on.

Conversation

- Talk direct to the person rather than through their companion.
- Relax and make eye contact.
- Use phrases such as "see you later" or "I'll be running along now" without embarrassment.
- To attract the attention of a deaf person, tap them on the shoulder or wave your hand.
- Find out if a person can lip-read. Look direct at the person and then speak slowly and clearly. Do not shout or exaggerate lip movement, as this will distort understanding.

- Facial expressions and gestures help deaf people to understand you. Face the source of light and keep hands, food from your mouth when you are speaking. If difficulties occur, try using written notes.
- Many profoundly deaf people use sign language interpreters. Sign language is a valid language with its own grammar, vocabulary and so on. Interpreters should be available if deaf people who use sign language are present at meetings or in official interview.
- When talking to a wheelchair user, get to their eye-level.
- When talking to a blind person, always introduce yourself and the people with you including their relative positions to you. Always say when you or anyone else is leaving the group.
- If you are talking to someone with a speech impairment, be patient and do not speak for the person. Ask questions that need a short answer and do not pretend to understand. If you are having difficulty, ask them again and repeat what you have understood for confirmation. If suitable use writing and speech facilitators.

General Behaviour

- Leaning on a person's wheelchair can annoy a wheelchair user. It is similar to leaning on a person and a wheelchair is part of a person's body space.
- When offering assistance to a blind person, allow the person to take your arm. You should guide rather than lead or propel the person. Advise on steps (state up or down) and other obstacles as they occur.
- To help a blind person sit down, offer to place their hand on the back of a chair.
- Treat disabled adults as adults not children. Call a person by their first name only when doing the same for others.
- Reserve head patting for pets - even though a wheelchair user's head may be temptingly at the same height. Disabled people usually find this patronising.

Common Courtesies

- Offer assistance to a disabled person and provide it only if wanted. Do not assume you know the best way of helping - listen to the disabled person's instructions.
- When directing a wheelchair user, consider any physical obstacles.

- If you are with a deaf person and there is an announcement or audible warning - change of platform at a station, or a fire alarm - make sure they understand what is happening.
- Do not grab the back of someone's wheelchair to push him or her along. Wheelchair users mostly get around under their own power. If they need help to overcome obstacles they will ask for it.
- When planning an event, get advice from disabled people. Advertise accessibility such as accessible toilets and information, sign language interpreters. Otherwise, disabled people may not attend because of previous difficult experiences.
- If someone has a learning disability give clear, simple instructions and confirm they have understood.
- Many people have hidden impairments, for example someone with epilepsy or asthma. It's better to ask than assume.

Final Point...

Emphasise the uniqueness and worth of all people as well as celebrating differences between them. Your efforts can do much to remove the "them and us" attitude that hampers the participation and equal opportunities of disabled people within society.

For help and advice contact: Disability in Camden (DISC)

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