



Including Disabled People

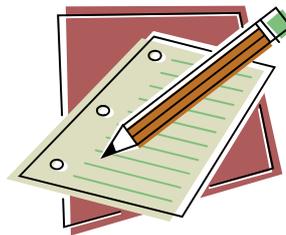
Are Your Events Accessible?

A Paper Prepared for Churches Together in England
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General Attitudes

Positive attitudes are the key to enabling disabled people to feel included in any event. To ensure that attitudes are positive and access is easy, include disabled people in the planning procedures of any event. Organisers will need to be flexible in order to fulfil participants' specific needs.

One person with learning difficulties complained that at an event she attended hardly anyone spoke to her - except to say 'hello' at which point the conversation ended. This is one way in which negative attitudes are expressed. Another way is by being over-helpful. For example, at breakfast one morning at a large conference, the awkwardness of some at the table was evident when a person in a wheelchair joined them. Again, few people spoke to him, but some insisted on pouring his tea and juice, even though the disabled person was perfectly capable of doing it himself, as had everyone else at the table. These attitudes highlight the continued need for disability awareness in churches, so that they learn to see disabled people as able people with the abilities to hold conversations, build relationships and contribute to the life of the church generally.



Registration Forms

Registration forms need to be clear, easy to read, and should provide opportunities for people to express

any specific needs they may have in order to participate in an event. On the registration form, an open question should be included concerning any extra needs or requirements a person may have. This will give people with any type of impairment an opportunity to state what support they will need in order to participate. Some people may also have specific dietary requirements, and participants must have an opportunity to specify those needs. Organisers should check that the venue is able to meet these requirements.

Getting to the Venue

It is important that any event is held in a venue which has good links to public transport, as people with certain impairments will be unable to drive. Organisers should check whether there are taxis in the local area capable of accommodating people who use wheelchairs. Some people may need to be met at the station. Venues will need to provide reserved parking for disabled people.



Access around the Venue for People with Mobility Impairments

It is essential that there are accessible facilities for people with mobility impairments. This will include ramps into and inside all buildings, rooms located on the ground floor or accessible by a lift, adapted shower and toilet facilities and so on. These guidelines apply to all parts of the building.

Doors with strong springs (such as fire doors) may be difficult for some, who may need assistance to go through them. It is important to check Health & Safety procedures and the extent to which they apply to disabled people.

A hilly venue may also cause problems especially if the meeting rooms are at the top of the hill and the accommodation is at the bottom (or visa versa). For people using electric wheelchairs, there is no problem. But for those in manually driven wheelchairs, or for people who simply find walking difficult, moving from building to building may be awkward and at times, potentially dangerous.



Printed Materials

Printed materials are important at any event and the guidelines below will help to make them accessible.

Fonts used on printed materials should be 'sans serif' which makes reading easier for people with dyslexia. The British Dyslexia Association recommends either 'Arial' or 'Comic Sans Serif'.

The use of different coloured paper is particularly helpful and can make finding the

right leaflet or booklet easier – especially if there are lots of different handouts.

Sometimes people with dyslexia need things printed on a specific colour. Some people with visual impairment need material printed on white paper, or may have difficulty with very dark coloured paper. A question about this on the registration form will enable handouts to be printed on the appropriate coloured paper prior to each event. It is also helpful to write the colour of each paper at the top, so that everyone knows how it will be referred to in the meeting.

Font size is also important. No handouts should use a font smaller than size 12. Large print versions of handouts should also be offered. RNIB recommend that for those who need large print, font sizes 14 - 18 are most useful.

Use of OHP's

OHP or PowerPoint slides are often used in presentations or in worship. These are helpful for many people, but for some are totally illegible. Ideally, printed copies of slides should also be available for those who may need them. Bringing attention to the printed copies at the beginning of worship or presentations is helpful.

Programme

Some disabled people may find that a long, concentrated timetable excludes them. A D/deaf* person who relies on sign language or lip-reading would undoubtedly be unable to participate in an event with no breaks.

Events should include plenty of breaks and, if possible, space when words are not being spoken. Sometimes disabled people need to use more energy than non-disabled people in order to concentrate and to participate fully. Thus they may need time

to rest and be refreshed. Spoken presentations ought to last no more than one hour without a break.

It is also recommended that events should not begin too early. Those who act as carers, and those who receive care, may need a lot of time in the morning in order to get ready. Organisers should use their discretion and consult participants.

The use of British Sign Language and the inclusion of the Deaf Community

It is appropriate that a sign language communicator or interpreter is present at all major events so that Deaf people do not need to ask in advance for support. For smaller events, an



interpreter will still be needed if organisers are aware that a Deaf person will attend. For an event that lasts for

more than one hour, however (and most events last much longer), there should ideally be at least two communicators booked. Interpreters and communicators get tired very quickly and should stop and then begin again at 20 minute intervals. Communicators should be fluent to *at least* CACDP Stage 2 and should have experience of communicating ecclesiastical language.

Deaf people often feel marginalized even when interpreters are present if they are constantly on the receiving end of interpreted information. Deaf people should be invited to present or help to lead worship in their own language. Often hearing people find sign language to be a helpful visual aid and it is good for hearing people to experience being on the receiving end of interpreted information.

The inclusion of deafened people

Deafened people are people who have acquired deafness after learning a good level of English. Most deafened people will not use a sign language interpreter. However, they may value being able to sit near the front at large gatherings.

Sensitivity is needed to include a deafened person and organisers should consult any participants about how best to do this. One option may include hiring a lip-speaking interpreter who sits opposite a deafened person and mouths the words to them. Technology may also be put to good use through voice recognition systems or by someone who types what is being said, with the words appearing on a computer screen (this works in a similar way to subtitles). In group work, deafened people can feel excluded if more than one person speaks at a time. Group management is therefore important.

** The use of the capital 'D' in Deaf Community and Deaf People refers to a very specific group of people. It includes those who use British Sign Language either as their first or preferred language and have an identity which is bound up with the culture, history and community of Deaf people. Deaf people are usually born Deaf or acquire Deafness before acquiring English. Deaf people themselves refer to themselves using the capital 'D' in order to make the point that they see themselves as a political group and a cultural and linguistic minority. This group of people is distinct from deafened people or deaf people (using the lower case 'd') which includes those people who do not identify themselves with the Deaf community.*

The use of Loop systems

In every venue in which there are large gatherings - including times of worship - loop systems need to be available and used by those leading. In large meetings, microphones and the loop system should be consistently used, not only by keynote speakers but also by those asking questions and those making contributions. The Chair of each meeting should remind other participants at the beginning of each gathering to come to the front and use the microphone if they wish to contribute. If a person has an impairment which means that this is impossible, the microphone should be taken to them.

Presentations

Some people, such as those with learning difficulties and people who use sign language, often find concentrating for a long period of time difficult. Visual aids can help to provide breaks from the demands which concentrating on words or sign language can present. Visual aids often communicate much more than words anyway.

Worship

Some disabled people feel that worship is often too 'wordy'. For people with learning difficulties, as well as for people who are Deaf or blind, the over-emphasis on words can be alienating. Using music on tapes or CD's (not group singing) or a visual focus for prayer, instead of words, helps to include people who find language difficult - and can speak powerfully to everyone.



Carers

Carers ought to be able to access support if they need it. It is recommended that carers be allocated a friend or 'buddy' who could offer them help. Carers *and* disabled people should be asked first whether they require this help. Both Carers and disabled people may also need time during the day when they are on their own or when they are away from each other. A friend or 'buddy' could help with this.

This paper has emerged out of a partnership between CHAD and Churches Together in England as a consequence of the 2001 Forum. Its purpose is to help those in churches and related organisations to be more inclusive of disabled people when co-ordinating events.

To construct the paper, a number of people with disabilities were asked to offer their reflections on the experience of being at the Forum. Among these were people with physical and mobility impairments, people with minor visual impairments, people with minor hearing impairments and people with learning difficulties. Those acting as carers for disabled people were also asked for comments and reflections. It should be noted that disabled people attending the Forum welcomed the fact that their needs were being taken seriously by Churches Together in England in this way.

The aim of the paper is to help churches and affiliated bodies to highlight and encourage their own good practice, as well as to make suggestions on those areas in which improvement is possible.

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