

A right to access, Louise age 19

Society is not built with disabled people in mind.

Imagine being a wheelchair user who is unable to get to work as there is no ramp on public transport or an autistic person who is unable to buy essentials because the chaos and colour of the town centre is too overwhelming. Because this is the reality for disabled people.

Accessibility is more than just removing a physical barrier; accessibility is giving the message to disabled children and young people that they are worthy of living the lives they imagined for themselves.

At school, for example, reasonable adjustments were made to allow me to access education. These included having a time out card for if I got overwhelmed by the sensory environment, I was also allowed to have fidget toys in my lessons and I had a dedicated staff member who I was able to speak to if I had concerns. These adjustments made the chaos, lack of structure and noise of the school environment almost bearable to me.

The basic rights that are taken for granted by so many, have to be fought for by disabled people. Although society has come so far, much of society is still inaccessible to disabled people, despite us having so much to offer.

Being disabled is having to plan everything in infinite detail and make decisions that other children and young people wouldn't have to make due to inaccessibility. Such as working out whether the environment where you are meeting friends after school is accessible or whether you simply just won't be able to go. It can be very exhausting trying to navigate accessibility.

Sometimes lack of accessibility occurs because of assumptions and stereotypes that are made about disabled people and these stereotypes must also be addressed if we want to breakdown inaccessibility.

For example, people might assume that disabled people do not like to play sport or go out to parties or nightclubs when in reality we do. Often, however, the reason that disabled people aren't at these venues isn't because we aren't interested, it is because they are inaccessible spaces. This then exacerbates the stereotype that disabled people aren't interested in these events and therefore these spaces aren't challenged to be more inclusive.

In order to improve accessibility, disabled people must have a seat at the table at every stage of the designing and implementing process. And in order to get to that stage, we need to have the ability in society to have what sometimes feel like difficult conversations about the barriers that exist.

Creating accessibility must be an integral part of every process rather than just an after thought. It must be viewed as everyone's responsibility to confront these barriers and commit to change rather than just a 'problem' to be dealt with solely by disabled people.

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The John Ellerman Foundation supports organisations to create positive change, allowing organisations to come together to tackle disadvantage, divisions and inequality. The John Ellerman Foundation supported the development of this blog.

This blog was prompted by Disability History Month 2020 and its focus on 'Access'. To read more, please visit: <https://ukdhm.org/>