

Social Model of Disability

Traditionally disabled people have been seen as a “problem”, and the answers have been to try and cure or care for us. Over the last thirty years disabled people have increasingly challenged this approach and we have developed our own theory on why we are excluded from society and its activities.

The following information is aimed as a simple introduction to the Social Model of Disability and to explain what it means.

Impairment: Some disabled people’s bodies are different – part of our bodies work differently, might even be missing. We call this “impairment” and we live with this every day and know all about it, more than any doctor, nurse, welfare professional or charity worker. The fact of our difference does not make us “less” than non-disabled people; however, society has always seen that there is something “wrong” with us, even to the extent of experimenting on us at times.

Disability: When a disabled person is prevented from carrying out a particular activity, such as getting on a bus, because their needs have not been addressed, we call that disability.

Barriers such as inaccessible information, housing and transport, segregated and/or poor quality schooling, hostile environments and attitudes and ways of working which exclude disabled people – these are what underpin our continued exclusion. However, if society were to arrange things differently (e.g. replace steps with ramps, make all telephones with a text facility, provide more information in Braille and on tape etc) then the barriers that stop us being independent could be removed.

This leaflet is also available in your preferred font size, Braille, audio and electronically from: GMCDP, BEVC, Aked Close, Ardwick, Manchester, M12 4AN.

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