

Expanding horizons – Opening doors

Autumn 2015

Letter from the editor

Hello Unlimited members and supporters

Welcome to the autumn newsletter. I like the autumn colours in the leaves but it is a bit sad that after that lovely late summer we now have greyer skies and rain.

There has been much in the news about welfare benefits and I expect many of you have been watching the TV or listening to the radio a bit worried about what changes the government will make. Certainly we will all have felt the pinch as local authorities have had to cut their adult and social care budgets, libraries close and supported transport is withdrawn.

Do let us know if you have been affected by Council cuts. Sharing stories is one way of making decision makers realise the impact cuts have on disabled people and gives us ammunition to help change their minds. You are one of 435 Unlimited members and together we can make a difference.

If you want cheering up look in the newsletter at the positive things Unlimited members have been doing all over Oxfordshire, challenging decisions and helping themselves and other disabled people. They have been tackling rubbish bin nuisance in Thame, making it better for visually impaired people using Barclays Bank and shops which are hard to get into on the Cowley Road.

Have you got a story of positive action that you want to share? Get in touch.

Joanna
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With thanks to Lil Sherwood

At the AGM we waved goodbye to Lil Sherwood from the committee. Lil has been the Deputy Chair and Secretary of Unlimited and on the committee for many years. For many members she was the face of Unlimited, organising coffee mornings and helping recruit new members at events. Lil also edited this newsletter and made sure that we had plenty of promotional materials. As Peter Hindshaw says "We couldn't have managed without her. Through good times and bad Lil kept the Unlimited ship sailing."

Although she is no longer on the committee we are really pleased that Lil is continuing to help out as a volunteer. You can't get rid of us that easily Lil!



One Small Step Project

This is a new project that Unlimited have been involved in over the summer in partnership with Age UK's Oxfordshire Get the Picture project.

One Small Step is the idea of an Unlimited member, Mark Stone. Mark had a gripe and wanted to do something about it. He is very fed up about how difficult some of the shops on the Cowley Road are to get into if you are a wheelchair user. Mark is a tall chap and uses a large motorised wheelchair. Before he was diagnosed with Motor Neurone Disease Mark did his shopping on the Cowley Road on foot but now he feels totally excluded from what is his local community.

Over the summer a group of Unlimited volunteers went along the Cowley Road assessing the accessibility of shops and business. The group included Dave who has a visual impairment and uses an assistance dog, Martin and Angela (two wheelchair users) and Ruth who uses a walking aid. They found that some shops were welcoming and accessible but not all. In the autumn we are going to do some more work with shop keepers who promised to make changes and are planning a celebration of shops and business that have made a real effort to include all their customers.

Retailers have made great strides in improving disabled access over the past few years but there is still much more that can be done.

Thousands of businesses are losing out on revenue by not offering adequate disabled access. The former Minister for Disabled People claimed last year that UK high streets could be overlooking £212 billion worth of spending power by not attracting disabled people and their families as disabled people represent one in every five customers.

However, businesses are also missing out on something potentially more beneficial than immediate revenue – building long-term customer loyalty. Research carried out last year by the lead sponsors of Disabled Access Day revealed an overwhelming 93% of disabled people would revisit a venue that has good accessibility. Over 90% of people surveyed also said that they try to look into a venue's accessibility in advance of their visit.

Unlimited's Committee

Unlimited is a registered charity and run by a management committee. Some of us are also Trustees of the charity. At the AGM in June the following people were elected to be on the committee.

Peter Hindshaw (Chair)
Rosie Blacker (Deputy Chair)
Joanna Matthews (Treasurer)
Dave Holmes (Membership secretary)
Ruth Conway
Martin Conway

Two new people have joined the committee

Steph Talbot
Ibrah Khan

Steph and Ibrah have both written a few words of introduction...

Ibrah Khan: I am a new committee member who has recently joined Unlimited Oxfordshire. I am a Coach at Oxford City, hoping to start an electric wheelchair team.



Steph Talbot: I joined Unlimited Oxfordshire in its first year. I had a major stroke in 2000 which resulted in a lot of sight loss.



If you can get online look at our website to read about all the committee members www.unltdox.org.uk

Can you spare a few hours once a month?

It isn't the most glamorous of jobs but we thought there might be some willing person out there who liked taking notes and typing them up! Is that person you?

Following Lil's retirement the committee is in need of a minute taker. We meet once a month on a Tuesday. The meeting is three hours and we need a simple record of them which takes at most an hour to compile in that same week. The rest of the time you can forget all about us. If not you, have you got a friend or relation who is looking for a volunteering opportunity?

Contact us via email info@unltdox.org.uk or phone 0800 044 8192

Meet a member

Angela Rye has been an Unlimited member since 2012. She joined because she is a wheelchair user and she wanted to find out about more accessible buildings in Oxford. Angela uses a motorised wheelchair because she has MS. She was an Occupational Therapist until 2012 but unfortunately had to stop work then because of illness. Angela and her partner have an allotment which she loves visiting still even though she can no longer do digging. However she enjoys tending her own small garden at home which she keeps in containers for ease of access. Their height makes it easier. Angela's top tip - plant pansies in pots for winter colour.



Recently Angela helped with the One Small Step Project by visiting shops on the Cowley Road. Angela is going to be on the steering group which leads the One Small Step Project.

Do you want to get involved in an Unlimited project like Angela?

Email us or ring (contact details at the bottom of the back page)

Get the Picture is a project that is going to use photography, video and other creative ideas to support people making their complaints and queries to the appropriate decision-makers. Age UK have 3 years of funding for this from a Comic Relief grant. Age UK have asked Unlimited to join them as partners to make sure that this Get the Picture project succeeds.

Advice and information for you, the consumer

Have you bought something which was faulty? Have you had poor service from a shop or business? Problems with your landlord? Do you think you are getting ripped off by your energy supplier?

October 1st saw some big changes in the legal framework in which we all shop: in particular, a new right to a refund within 30 days if you buy something that's faulty, whether it's online, through a high street store, or from any retailer. So digital films, music, games and books are now covered. The Citizens Advice service and Oxfordshire Trading Standards can help you. The Citizens Advice Consumer Service provides consumer information and advice and the Trading Standards Service will take enforcement action where needed.

TELEPHONE ADVICE: The Citizens Advice consumer service runs a helpline – your first port of call with consumer problems: 03454 04 05 06

ONLINE ADVICE: Citizens Advice's online guide www.AdviceGuide.org.uk which contains 800 pages of self-help information under the heading Consumer, from cars to water supply ... and flooding.

FACE TO FACE ADVICE: You can, as always, go to one of the CAB offices in person where, if they can't help you directly, they will either signpost you to the Consumer helpline or discuss your case with Oxfordshire Trading Standards (OTS) with a view to referring you on to them. Referrals to Trading Standards will normally occur where there is a vulnerable consumer involved or a complex consumer/trader dispute where documents need reviewing.

Can you help make our museums more accessible?

Oxford University Museums is looking for blind and partially sighted volunteers to help with a new project.

They are looking for around 8 people to be part of an advisory panel for the project. It would involve coming to the museums for around 4 meetings over 12 months, starting in Autumn 2015. All travel expenses would be reimbursed. If you, or anyone you know, would be interested in being part of the panel, please contact Susan Griffiths on 01865 282456 or email susan.griffiths@oum.ox.ac.uk

Pavement Problems?

OXTRAG want to remind Unlimited members to report any issues such as broken paving slabs, potholes, surface quality etc. to www.fixmystreet.com, as this alerts our local councils to the need for action. Apple iOS & Google Android Apps are also available.

If you don't have access to the internet, you can phone Oxfordshire County Council's general inquiry line on 01865 792422 or 0845 310 1111.

OXTRAG is the Oxford Transport and Access Group.

Free courses for unpaid carers

Carer's Oxford are running free carers training at different venues and on a variety of dates all over Oxfordshire. Courses include Confidence to Care and First Aid.

For example on the Confidence to Care course after the introductory session, you will look at how your caring role fits with other aspects of your life and the balance in your life between caring commitments and your other needs. Caring can be stressful so there will be a session on ways of coping with stress which gives you time and space to look at emotions involved in looking after someone and how to deal with them.

Session 4 looks at the fundamentals of looking after someone each day, from medication to emergencies at home. This session will look at up to date benefits and services available to carers and how to go about accessing and getting the most out of them.

The final session will include a short talk about Powers of Attorney by a local solicitor. Time will also be allocated for questions about other legal issues. The local Outreach Worker from Carers' Oxfordshire will also attend to talk about carers assessments and support services available and ways to move forward.

For further details or to book on any of these free courses please email traceydesmond@carersoxfordshire.org.uk or telephone 01235 520463

Carers Assessment application

There are over 60,000 carers in Oxfordshire. Are you one of them? Is so you may be eligible for a grant of up to £600. More information and friendly help can be received by calling 0845 050 766 or emailing carersoxfordshire@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Peachcroft Coffee Caff recently hosted a visit from the PALS department from the JR. Many people who have tried using this service have not received useful service. Simon has now undertaken the task of addressing this shortfall and would appear to be restructuring PALS with the aim of giving it the teeth needed to represent the patient's one more. He is happy to speak personally with anyone who requires a direct name to approach. It is easy to remember, "Simon Said" on 01865 221473

Bins in the way again

As many Unlimited members tell us rubbish bins left in the way on the pavement on collection day are a real problem, particularly for wheelchair users. The bins block the pavement and make it impossible to get past. Bins not put back are also an issue if you have an impairment and cannot move them yourself. One member in Thame, Kimberly Hunter, has been campaigning to get this issue sorted by lobbying Vale of White Horse District Council. She has also been in touch with her Councillor and local MP which is something you can do to if you have a problem that needs sorting. This is a recent letter she got from the local council which shows the progress she has made. Great work Kimberly!

Dear Kimberly Hunter,

Thank you for the email and suggestions which are certainly accepted in the spirit of cooperation as the district council takes its responsibility of Equalities extremely seriously.

I have met with the Biffa Business Manager and Operations Manager and made them fully aware of your concerns and have passed to them the specific roads raised in your email. The Business Manager only joined this contract in January and has been working hard with the crews to ensure bins are returned correctly. This has included additional onsite training and also deducting monies from crews that are not performing to the standards expected of them. Both Biffa and the Council expect to see a continuing improvement in bin placement over the next few months.

Arrangements are in place for a consultant to come in and review the councils and Biffa procedures around the call centre and general communications between all parties to see what improvements can be made, as part of this the delay in responding to complaints will be addressed. This work is due to start in the Autumn.

Cameras have already been fitted to the majority of vehicles so monitoring is possible although the process of reviewing footage can be time consuming so will only be used in certain circumstances but is available if it is considered appropriate.

I take on board your suggestion of a text alert and the council is always looking at ways to assist residents to contact us. However I am not sure if this is something that could be introduced but I will certainly speak to our Communications team. If residents do have a regular issue with bin placement problems they can always contact us by email : waste.team@southandvale.gov.uk.

The council retains a list of all properties that are receiving an assisted collection, this list is already provided to the collection crews so they should be fully aware not to cause access issues to these properties and it is this that we will be working with Biffa to ensure doesn't happen.

Please be assured that this matter is taken very seriously and we will be pleased to continue working with you to ensure our responsibilities relating to Equalities are fully met.

Yours sincerely

Ian Matten
Waste and Parks Manager



Bother with banking? Dave's on the case

Committee member Dave Holmes has complained to his local branch of Barclays Bank and met with a sympathetic response.

Until September this branch had 5 cashier points and customers stood in line and an automatic audio message announced which cashier was free. Then two new ATM machines were installed. This has resulted in less queues for cashiers. However, the announcement telling customers which cashier point was free is no longer made..

Dave's complaint to the bank was that this change discriminates against visually impaired people and it does not give VI people social inclusion.

Dave recently met with the Branch Manager to make a complaint regarding social inclusion for visually impaired people. He then had a phone call from Derrick Brown, from the Specialist Complaints Team at Barclays head Office. Their discussion was very positive, supportive and helpful.

Well done Dave for taking up this complaint, which will benefit other people using the branch. Disabled people are not always met with such a helpful response but in this case it seems like Barclays are taking it seriously and have the right attitude. We will keep you updated on this issue.

Is there something you want to complain about? Get in touch on info@unltdox.org.uk



What's bugging you John?

This is a regular feature from Unlimited Member John Well's. He likes to let off steam in the newsletter!



Please Do Not Touch

Why is it, just because we are disabled, some people feel they can touch us (arm on the shoulder, or worse a pat on the head if we are in a wheel-chair), or ask us personal questions? We should be given the same level of respect as 'able' people; we are not babies, children, or pets! Some members of the public may be genuinely trying to be friendly or helpful; but some just inquisitive.

If someone touches me, then I tend to lose my balance and fall over – staying upright is a challenge for me. Wheel-chair users find their chair route blocked by 'well-wishers', when the disabled person just wants to get on with their trip.

The problem is worse for guide-, hearing-, and assistance-dogs. They are working animals, and constantly watching their owner for commands. Patting them and saying 'what a lovely dog' completely distracts the dog, so it can no longer help his owner. At a Victorian field-ploughing competition, one wouldn't go up to a cart-horse pulling a plough and start patting and stroking it; one lets it get on with its job. Same should go for working dogs.

It also surprises me that some of the public feel they can ask us questions just because we are disabled. A little while ago, in a local theatre during the interval, a lady came up to me and started asking me why I use crutches. She was polite and sympathetic, but persisted in her questioning about my exact illness. Eventually I was forced to say 'I am sorry, but I prefer not to discuss my personal health matters with a total stranger'. She disappeared, silenced and subdued! However, if I go out for pleasure to see a play, I don't want to be quizzed on my medical history.

All I am asking is to be treated with the same respect that one treats 'able' people. Is this unreasonable?

John Wells

What do you think about what John's point of view? Get in touch info@unltdox.org.uk

Florence Park Community Centre holds a Friday lunch club for the over 60s from 12 to 2pm.

Everyone receives a warm welcome and is encouraged to take part in the wide range of activities. Ranging from spinning wool from a fleece to computer skills.

Lance takes a UO laptop & the club has 3 iPads to empower those who require help to understand emails etc.

The Coffee Caff at Peachcroft

Unlimited Oxfordshire invites you to join us at our Coffee Caff events at Peachcroft Christian Centre, Abingdon, OX14 2RC.

The event takes place on the second Thursday of every month from 2-4pm.

This is a free event and everyone is welcome!



Remembering Doreen Wright

We had sad news that Doreen Wright passed away peacefully in her sleep on 12th September.

Doreen was an active member of Unlimited and we were always given a presentation of her latest research and activities when she attended the Peace House meetings. Despite her limiting mobility she continued to push for the wellbeing of all and took an individual responsibility to encourage shops and business to provide easier access. Her enthusiasm and commitment were an inspiration to everyone who met her. The Unlimited committee and members will miss her greatly and we send our sincere condolences to her family and friends.

A service of thanksgiving was held October 1st at the Church of the Holy Family, Blackbird Leys (after a short service for family and close friends at the Crematorium).

Disabled Access Day 2016

The second Disabled Access Day will take place on Saturday 12 March 2016, with more than 50 venues across the UK already signed up, including Westminster Abbey, Tate Modern, and the Scottish parliament.

It follows the success of the first Disabled Access Day (DAD), on 17 January 2015, which saw 261 venues across 11 countries take part – including Portugal, Turkey and Bulgaria – a figure organisers are confident they will improve on next year.

The idea for DAD came from powerchair-user Paul Ralph, who had been inspired by an event held by his local bus company, which gave wheelchair-users the opportunity to explore the layout of a bus and learn how to get on and off safely.

As a result of that event, he became a regular bus-user and then realised by chatting with friends how great it would be if there were similar initiatives in other parts of the country, all happening on the same day. Out of that came Disabled Access Day with the idea of encouraging disabled people to also try something new.

Ralph is a supporter of DAD's main sponsor, Euans' Guide, www.euansguide.com a listings and review website and mobile phone app that helps disabled people find accessible venues such as visitor attractions, cinemas, sports grounds and hotels, and facilities such as hospitals, banks and post offices.

Information provided by John Pring,
www.disabilitynewsservice.com

Would you like to see a Disabled Access Day event somewhere in Oxfordshire?

Update on issues

Last autumn Dave Holmes reported on an issue concerning obstacles on public pavements that he was dealing with on behalf of a south Oxford resident with a visual impairment. The good news is that this issue has been solved fairly satisfactorily with the support and co-operation of the local councillors, the waste collection company, City council street scene and the residents. Wheelie bins are being collected and returned from just inside the perimeter of the gardens, hedges and bushes have been cut back and vehicles owners are being careful not to park too far onto the pavement.

Note: Did you know that it is not illegal to park with two wheels on the pavement as long as you do not cause an obstruction. It was de-criminalised and it is up to the local authority to decide if vehicles are causing an obstruction. Dealing with issues does take a lot of determination and time but it is worth it. Remember if you need guidance on how to approach an issue which is causing you a problem day to day ring us or email us. Contact details below.

Other issues that we have helped with this year are: access to Christchurch meadows via Rose lane; broken and uneven slabs on pavements; support for a visually impaired bus traveller, blue badge criteria; where to get housing support if you live in West Oxfordshire; spare room tax; carers and supporters allowance; hospital outpatients appointments; problems with shop mobility in Witney; and emergency pull cords.

We have received many reports from our members of issues that they have dealt with themselves. Well done and keep up the good work.

New Ways to get in touch

We have lots of new ways to get in touch with us. If you can get online we have a new website and facebook page (see below for details). Do have a look and join in. You can post photos and comments on our Facebook page and tell us what is going on.

If you are on Twitter we tweet news as well. Follow us and we will retweet your updates about disability issues in Oxfordshire.

Remember you can always ring us up. Because we don't have an office and we are all volunteers who work from home then email and phone is the best way to get in touch. But if you would like to write then you can send a letter to the address below.



Contact details: www.unltdox.org.uk email: info@unltdox.org.uk

Tel: 0800 044 8192

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