

Expanding horizons – Opening doors

Autumn 2017

Letter from the editor

Dear Unlimited Members,

It was a pleasure to meet some of you at this year's AGM/Tea Party. It certainly helps to motivate those of us on Unlimited's Committee to work harder for you when we hear your stories and can discuss those issues that are of concern to you right now. If we can build up some case studies that we can take to the local Councils it reinforces our argument for change - whether it is about communication, physical access, housing, benefits, transport or social care. So please let us know about your experiences and what you would like us to lobby for.



There was a very good attendance at the year's AGM/Tea Party and we were delighted to welcome as our guests Councillor Glynis Phillips (who sits on the planning and regulation committee of Oxfordshire County council and represents the Barton, Risinghurst and Sandhills area of Oxford) and Councillor Marie Tidball (who is spokesperson on public health on Oxford City Council and representing the Hincksey Park Ward.) Marie herself is a disabled person.

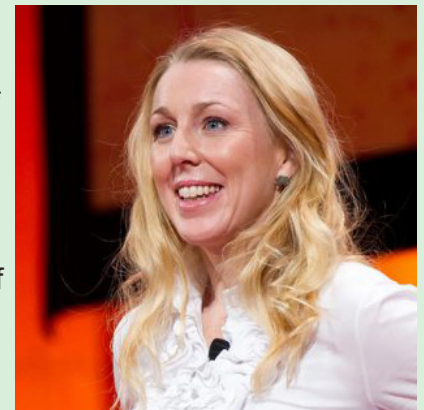
There were some lively discussions with everyone's energy kept up by the delicious homemade cakes made by Steph Talbot. The venue at the Quaker Friends' House on St Giles was a success, though with a group of attendees using large motorised scooters we may need a bigger room next year!

Sometimes being disabled feels as though one is having to solve numerous practical problems all day long, so when a group comes up with a solution to one of those problems we can all be grateful - and that is what Euan's Guide have done with their Red Cord cards and bus operators have done with their Journey Assistance Cards - both are featured in this newsletter.

Diane Sider, Editor

Too #valuable to ignore

A global campaign has launched to push the business community to tackle disability exclusion around the world. The campaign, **#valuable**, calls on businesses to recognise the value of the one billion people living with a disability. In the UK the current employment rate for disabled people is half that of people without disabilities, a gap that has widened since 2010.



#valuable has been launched to tackle these inequalities and exclusion in business. Spearheading the campaign is Irish award-winning activist, social entrepreneur and Binc founder Caroline Casey, who is registered blind.

According to the World Health Organisation, up to half of businesses in OECD countries may choose to pay fines rather than meet quotas on disability.

Yet, combined with their friends, families and communities, globally the one billion disabled people hold a disposable annual income of \$8 trillion a year – an opportunity that business cannot afford to ignore. It's estimated that a 5% improvement in UK disabled employment would increase GDP by £23bn and add £6bn to the Exchequer by 2030. Despite only 17% of people being born with their impairment or condition, and the vast majority acquiring it later in life, it's still seen by many as a sideline issue.

'I never thought when I began this, that the issue of disability in business wouldn't really change in 18 years... We want to position disability equally within the inclusion and diversity agenda in business. Not more than, just equally. Disability is intersectional – it crosses gender, race, religion. It's everywhere,' says Casey.

New Accessible £10 Note

The new Jane Austin polymer £10 note was launched on September 14th. This is the first UK banknote designed to be accessible to people with visual impairments. The Bank of England worked with the **Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB)** to build accessibility into the design of the new polymer note. It features a new tactile feature, with two clusters of raised dots at the top left corner of the note to allow blind or partially sighted people to identify the value of the note easily. The Bank's notes have different colours for different values and the '10' has also been enlarged to make it easier to identify. The polymer note is cleaner, safer and stronger than traditional notes and much more difficult to counterfeit. The tactile feature lasts longer with polymer. The Bank held a number of focus groups with people from RNIB to check if people would use a tactile feature and the response was firmly positive, but it was not considered appropriate to use Braille because not many people would be reading Braille. The shapes were also adjusted to ensure they could be felt easily. The new note is a good example of 'inclusive design' where a product is designed and tested to ensure accessibility prior to production. The Bank of England will also include these features on the new polymer £20, due to be released in 2020.



OxPA Botley Road audit

I have been a committee member of Unlimited since October 2016 and a member of Oxford Pedestrians Association (OxPA) (www.oxpa.org.uk) since January 2017. In July 2017, some OxPA members walked up and down both sides of the Botley Road in Oxford, to conduct an audit of the road, to identify what could be done to make life easier and safer for pedestrians of all ages and abilities.

Botley Road was very noisy with the sound of vehicle engines and the air was dirty with soot from car exhausts. Steep cambers make crossing many side roads difficult for wheelchair users. I could not have managed the journey alone, as I needed help negotiating the steep cambers at the dropped kerbs, many of which were off desire lines at the junction of side roads.

There were two short areas where the pavement was wide and flat, but these were interrupted by cycle lanes cutting right across the footway and slicing it in half, so that pedestrians were forced to the side of the pavement nearest to the traffic and where the pavement is most degraded.

Having the pedestrian lane of the pavement next to the road is very dangerous. Pedestrians are at risk of being hit by cyclists moving from the road to the cycle lane on the pavement. Also, parts of the pavement containing the pedestrian lane lean toward the road and a wheelchair user could easily slide off the pavement into the road.

Main points for improvements are:

1. The cycle and pedestrian lanes should be switched round so the cycle lane is adjacent to the carriageway.
2. Pavement extensions – as on Prestwich Place - are needed across the entrance to Mill Street, Hillview Road, Alexandra Road, Oatlands Road, Harley Road, Riverside Road, Duke Street, Binsey Lane, Helen Road, Henry Road, Abbey Road, at the entrance to the Park & Ride car park and at the entrance to the Volvo building on the north side of Botley Road.
3. More zebra crossings are needed across Botley Road itself, especially outside Waitrose and where the Thames Path crosses the road by Osney Island.
4. Wider pavements are needed on Osney Island Thames Bridge and outside St Frideswide Church where the bus shelter has been installed.

We hope the City Council will take note and make these improvements soon.

Don O'Neal, Committee Member



Donnington Over 50's Group

Diane Sider gave a talk to the Donnington Over 50's Group on October 10th about the work Unlimited Oxfordshire has been doing. Several people in the group are disabled and a lively discussion was had about the accessibility or lack of accessibility of Oxford City Centre. Some people felt the City Council favoured policies which helped the Universities, tourists and people coming into Oxford from elsewhere to work but too often failed to assist the ordinary residents. The group also took part in a quiz about disability etiquette and communicating with disabled people which they found useful.

Donnington Over 50's Group is supported by Age UK and Mid Counties Coop. They meet on Tuesday mornings at 10.00 in Donnington Community Centre, Townsend Square OX4 4BB Tel 01865 434646. There is a keep fit class and a IT session and a talk by a visiting speaker. New members welcome.

Meet the Member - Alison Miles



Alison Miles joined Unlimited a couple of years ago. 'I didn't know any other disabled people so I was interested in finding out how others learn to do things when they become disabled.' Alison got in touch with us when her eyesight failed to the point where she wasn't confident using her bank card pin number but didn't want to share it with a carer. Since then Alison has kept in touch and offered to volunteer for one-off tasks for us. She has now lost all her useful vision but uses a scanner to read her post and the newsletter. Her other top gadget is her Dictaphone which acts as a notepad when she is on the phone. 'I have a really good memory too, so phone numbers stick in my head.' A volunteer supporter comes once a week to help sort out bills and other paperwork.

She now lives in the Forest Farm area but was born and brought up in Farringdon, working in a shop before she moved to Oxford. She stopped working because of sight loss through Retinitis Pigmentosa, part of her rare genetic condition. Initially diagnosed with one syndrome, doctors at Queen Elizabeth's Birmingham (where Alison goes for regular treatment) now think she may have an even rarer condition called Oliver MacFarlane syndrome. 'I just call it Alison's syndrome' she jokes, 'I'm like a tortoise – slow, but I get there.'

For 24 years Alison has been a volunteer at Oxford Citizens Advice Bureau helping out by answering the phone. She started out in their Princes Street offices near Cowley Road and then moved with them to St Aldates. Another thing she enjoys doing is going to Oxford Playhouse because they have a wide variety of shows to suit all tastes. She finds the audio description hit and miss – it can be a bit frustrating if it is a very lively show, like the pantomime, because then she misses some of the description but it is very useful for other types of theatre. Alison has also been gliding and up in a hot air balloon.

She used to travel a lot by bus but now relies on taxis. 'My balance isn't great now. I look like I've had a bit too much to drink!'

A newbie with a wheelchair Alison has found the public are more respectful of her now than when she just used her white cane. 'Am I more visible?' she asks. She finds shopping independently difficult because of heavy doors; she thinks all shops should be made to have automatic doors.

Another big frustration is the allocation of care hours; she has recently been restricted to just half an hour at night to support with eating. We have suggested she goes back to her social worker to apply for a personal budget, which will give her more flexibility to meet her needs. She thinks Unlimited is a good thing because it is helpful to have someone to phone up if you have a problem. She knows Unlimited will try their best to find the right organisation to provide advice or support if they cannot answer the question themselves.

We are pleased to welcome Alison to Unlimited's Committee.

Joanna Matthews

Red Cord Cards



Euan's Guide, the website featuring disabled access reviews by disabled people for disabled people, have produced a card to hang on the red cords of accessible toilets. This follows repeated complaints that the cords are often too short.

So far Euan's Guide have sent out 20,000 cards worldwide. You can get copies of the card free of charge to hang up yourself on any toilet you visit.

www.euanguide.com/news/red-cord-card

E: hello@euanguide.com

Tel: 0131 510 5106

What is Hate Crime?

Hate crimes are any crimes that are targeted at a person because of hostility or prejudice towards that person's:

- disability
- race or ethnicity
- religion or belief
- sexual orientation
- transgender identity

If an Unlimited member has experienced abuse or violence because they are a disabled person that is a hate crime and can be reported. It might be that someone has shouted names at you, taken money from you or told you to buy them things when you didn't want to, it might also be that someone has physically hurt you or damaged your property.

Someone doesn't have to hate you to commit these crimes against you, they may only dislike the fact you are disabled or gay for example. This might be difficult to prove and you may try to ignore it but it is really important that you let someone know if you think you are being targeted.

Hate Incidents can feel like crimes to those who suffer them and often escalate to crimes or tension in a community. For this reason the police are concerned about incidents and you can use this site to report non-crime hate incidents:

www.victimsupport.org.uk/crime-info/types-crime/hate-crime 0808 168 9111

The police can only prosecute when the law is broken but can work with partners to try and prevent any escalation in seriousness.

Why should I report hate crime?

Hate crimes and incidents hurt; they can be confusing and frightening. By reporting them when they happen to you, you may be able to prevent these incidents from happening to someone else.

You will also help the police understand the extent of hate crime in your local area so they can better respond to it.

How can I report a hate crime?

Report to the Police

You can report hate crime to the police using the non-emergency number 101. In an emergency please dial 999.

Report to the Hate Crime Network by calling: 0300 1234 148.

Disability Rights Post Brexit



Disability Rights UK has produced a manifesto on what the disability rights sector should be seeking from a post-EU UK. The main proposals of the manifesto:

1. All EU-based disability rights existing at the time the UK leaves the EU to be maintained.
2. Maintenance of existing disability rights which are incorporated in domestic law at the time of exit.
3. Continued Government commitment to the UK being ahead of the curve on disability rights.
4. At least matching current EU funding in real terms of Disabled Peoples' Organisations (DPOs) and disability rights.
5. A full equality impact assessment by Government of plans for freedom of movement.
6. Continued mutual recognition of initiatives useful to disabled people.
7. Giving the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities heightened status in domestic UK law.
8. Continued commitment to the European Convention on Human Rights.

The full manifesto can be found at:

www.disabilityrightsuk.org/news/2017/june/our-manifesto-disability-rights-post-eu-uk

The Disability Rights UK website is also a good source of practical information and includes factsheets which provide basic information about benefits, tax credits, social care and other disability related issues for claimants and advisers.

www.disabilityrightsuk.org/

They also have several helplines:

Disabled Students Helpline 0800 328 5050
Equality Advisory Support Service 0800 800 0082
Personal Budgets Helpline 0300 555 1525
Welfare Rights Advice Service 0808 800 3333

Report on Activities 2016/2017

I last reported on Unlimited's activities at our tea party and AGM in October 2016. At that meeting we gained three new committee members – Sue Butterworth, Don O'Neal and Diane Sider – and said goodbye to Dave Holmes. Martin Conway resigned from the committee during the year. Ruth Conway resigned as a trustee and committee member at the AGM October 2017. While I took the post of Chair, Don chairs our committee meetings as well as looking after the membership database, updating the website and Facebook page. Diane took over editing the newsletter and Sue brought her years of experience of the Oxfordshire disability sector to our meetings, continuing to introduce us to new networks. Rosie carried on handling queries coming by phone and email from individual members and other organisations as well as tweeting for Unlimited, and Steph represented Unlimited at meetings of our sister organisation OXTRAG and at the Vale and District access group. We had support from two valuable volunteers - Lil Sherwood, who makes sure the newsletters mailing reaches all our members, and Bob Hundley who creates the artwork for the newsletter. Bob also designed our new promotional postcard (enclosed in the newsletter).

Unlimited has 393 members including 10 new members who joined this year. Members live all over Oxfordshire, but perhaps the majority live in Oxford city boundaries. We offer support and information to any disabled person living in the county. Membership is not a requirement but is a valuable resource when raising concerns and issues with the City, District and County Councils.

We have produced four newsletters since the last AGM. Our Facebook page gets between 3 and 210 readers at a time. We have 183 Twitter followers and gain a couple every month or so. It is important to diversify our membership, and particularly engage more young people.

We have sent email bulletins this year to alert members to local or national consultations. Oxfordshire County Council is keen to hear the views of individual disabled people and we encourage them to make their consultations as accessible and wide-reaching as possible. We promoted Oxford Healthwatch's query regarding people's social care assessments, reviews and waiting times.

We are able to give relevant information about support to all those who contact us. However it is noticeable that sources of free and open access support are dwindling as funding is cut. Another concern is how difficult it is to access information if you are not online.

Many public and not-for-profit agencies do not always provide information in an accessible way. A major complaint of our members is physical access to shops, cafes and business premises.

Other concerns are about problems with claiming disability benefits and lack of health and social care support for themselves or their families.

Diane, Rosie and I had two meetings with the Oxford City Council planning team. We met the Head of Planning, the Environmental Services Manager and the (Acting) City Centre Strategy Manager with a promise of further closer working with them as the City's new strategic plan is drawn up. It is a real problem that Oxford City does not have an access officer and they acknowledged that the plan to make all their staff responsive to access needs after they made the access officers redundant has not worked.

Don and I are now individual members of the County Council's new co-production Board; Don is the Co-Chair alongside Kate Terroni the Director of Adult Social Care. She is a valuable person for us to have closer links with. Good friends to Unlimited are Deborah Wheelan and Lynne Hooper (OXTRAG), Jan Cottle (Carers Oxfordshire), Cheryl Reeve (Vale and South access officer), Jon Hyslop and Keith Birnie (Community Glue) and Maggie Newton who runs the voluntary group DITTO in Witney.

Sue and Steph carried out an access audit of the new Stonehill Community Garden to help increase access. We are approached by other community groups wanting support, but as we have to cover our travel and expenses for visiting it is not always possible for them to give us a donation.

Diane and I were both interviewed by BBC Radio Oxford on their Saturday breakfast show. For the Cowley Road Carnival we shared our guide for shop and café owners on top tips for making their business more accessible, with a focus on the benefits of getting more customers. I wrote a 'how to do accessible events checklist' for Oxford Folk Festival and had several phone meetings with their volunteers about what how to meet the needs of disabled gig goers and performers.

Through committee members we have links to the Abingdon Stroke Services, Oxford Pedestrian Association, and Oxford Civic Society. I am on the National User Group of Shaping Our Lives and attend the Independent Living Strategy Group of the House of Lords. Sue is an active member of Tourism for All, which promotes travel for people with disabilities, and through this to the Shopmobility network. The Lord Lieutenant's office and various other local groups including Community Glue helped to advertise our need for a new Chair. We have not been successful so far but we will continue to look for new committee members inside and outside our membership.

Joanna Matthews

Make Your Journey Easier



Using a bus or coach can be an off-putting experience for some passengers with disabilities and so a code has been drawn up with bus companies to improve the interaction between passengers with hidden disabilities and bus drivers. It includes:-

- A Journey Assistance Card which describes your needs (see above).
- Drivers are trained to think about different passenger needs and how to have a sympathetic response to the assistance card.
- The assistance cards are in a standard format across the bus industry so you should be able to use yours across the UK.

You can get Journey Assistance Cards by contacting the bus company in your area and agreeing which card or cards would most help you on your journeys.

Oxford Bus Company 01865 785400
www.oxfordbus.co.uk/accessforall/

Stagecoach 01865 772250
www.stagecoachbus.com/promos-and-offers/national/journey-assistance-cards

Unlimited have a stock of these cards if you want us to send you some. Do you make bus journeys? Tell us about your Oxfordshire bus journeys good and bad.

Westgate Shopping Centre



Choosing to visit the new Westgate Shopping Centre during the half-term break was probably not the best idea as it was heaving with families with children in pushchairs and wheelchairs. However it was useful to find out about facilities for disabled people.

There was no problem with level access to the stores (about half of which remain empty until nearer Christmas) but visitors need to be prepared to walk quite long distances and there were not many seats apart from those in cafés and restaurants.

You will have to get used to where the lifts are situated - they are not all that obvious to find although there are direction signposts throughout the centre. The lifts are also not huge so one can wait quite a long time to get in one - two baby buggies and a wheelchair fill one. Not all the lifts go from car park to roof level so it can be a bit confusing finding the right lift for where you want to get to - it may mean taking two lifts.

Public toilets are situated in one corner on the Roof Level 2 so leave yourself plenty of time to reach them. There is one disabled accessible toilet of fairly standard size as you reach the toilet area but fortunately there is also one Changing Places toilet tucked round the corner. This has a hoist, room to transfer from a wheelchair on either side, and a motorised height-adjustable changing bed. This will make life much easier for families with grown children and for adults that need to change. There were no bins to dispose of waste products when I visited but presumably this is just one of the early 'teething troubles'; we have informed the site manager.



Shopmobility

Oxford City Council have ceased funding the Shopmobility service so from the opening of the new Westgate Centre responsibility for mobility services will be by Interserve International who also provide security and cleaning services. The Shopmobility office is situated in the west corner of Car Park Level -2. At the time of my visit they had no phone line but this should be in place shortly. In the meantime visitors who want to borrow a wheelchair or mobility scooter can just turn up and request one. You need to take identification with proof of name and address. Bookings will be required once the phone is installed. There is plenty of car parking for disabled drivers near the Shopmobility office in Section U of the underground car park but please note there is a charge. On my visit I stayed four hours and paid £7.00.

The Oxford Central Library is part of the new Westgate Centre and will open on December 18th.

Diane Sider

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