

Expanding horizons – Opening doors

Spring 2016

Greetings from the Editor

Hello and welcome to our spring Newsletter.

We got a lovely letter from an Unlimited member, Maria, in response to the last newsletter. She said "Thank you for all you do on our behalf. My idea of Utopia is when everywhere is accessible to us who are disabled." Here, here Maria.



We are busy preparing for Disabled Access Day on March 12th. We do hope you will be able to join in too. Elsewhere in the newsletter we have an update on Frideswide Square, and invitation to join in with research and what to do if you are not happy with the service you have had from the NHS.

We had sad news this month of the death of two of Oxfordshire's Disabled activists; Mark Stone and Steve Vinnicombe. Both did so much to help make the lives of disabled people in Oxford better and they will be sorely missed.

Do get in touch if anything in the newsletter makes you curious, enthusiastic or just plain cross! We love to hear from you by phone, email or letter. Don't forget we are on Facebook and twitter too.

Enjoy the sunshine and the longer days, Joanna

Didcot Access Group

Did you know that Didcot had a group of disabled people that meet regularly to gather views from disabled people in the Didcot area? Didcot Access group (DAG) are keen to hear from all disabled people who live in or near the town on what they think about new developments (for example the Orchard Centre), ways to tackle misuse of disabled parking bays, and more and better facilities for disabled people such as benches, bus shelters and better maintenance of pavements. Suggestions are then made to the District Council by Cheryl Reeves who works for South and Vale District Council and helps run the group.

The date of next meeting is 4 May 2016

Contact Cheryl Reeves
Cheryl.Reeves@southandvale.gov.uk

01235 540324

Text phone users add 18001 before you dial

Transport news

As many of you are aware Oxfordshire County Council is planning to take away all subsidised bus services and rural Dial a Ride services from April 2016.

OXTRAG has written to all Oxfordshire MP's (with a poor response) and highlighted OCC's unrealistic expectation that volunteers will pick-up the work of professional drivers of these services. OXTRAG say OCC should adopt a Taxi-Card scheme to prevent isolation of disabled and elderly people where services have been removed. Maybe Unlimited could support / help press for this (or another way if you can suggest one) of ensuring inclusion.

The next OXTRAG meeting is 1.30-3.30 on Tuesday March 15th at Speedwell House and the Speaker is Emily Lewis-Edwards from Communityfirstoxon, the organisation who oversaw all the consultation work on this issue for OCC. Unlimited members are very welcome at the meeting.

Do you think a Taxi Card scheme is a good idea? Do you have other ideas about ensuring inclusion in transport services?

Get in touch with your ideas on
info@unltdox.org.uk



'A' Boards



No! This is not a 'typo'; I did not mean 'some boards'! 'A' boards are the pairs of boards, hinged at the top. Observed from the side, they do look like the letter 'A'. Shops and cafes put A boards out to attract customers, they also seriously impede most disabled people who wish to pass.

A pavement is only as wide as its narrowest point. Placing 'A' boards on the pavement does narrow the passage-way, causing a bottle-neck and an inconvenience for everyone. For many disabled people they are a severe menace. Blind people can easily simply walk straight into them; wheel-chair people with an assistance dog alongside often do not have sufficient pavement width remaining to even get past the boards. Some pedestrians are too busy with their shopping (or mobile phones!) to think to give way to a disabled person attempting to pass an 'A' board. We get stuck behind the boards, and cannot pass.

Some shops own a strip of land in front of the shop; in these cases there is also the full public pavement width available for pedestrians; the shops may do as they wish with their own land. However, shop-keepers should not block the highway (road or pavement) with their advertising boards. Some years ago the predecessor to Unlimited (OCDP), and the then city Access Officer, had a 'blitz' on these boards, and managed to clear pavements of most obstructions. It was stated city policy that public pavements were not to be used for 'A' boards.

We now have no Access Officers (City or County) responsible for supporting local disabled people. In Oxford, the City Council itself has concreted into the pavement large boards along the High Street advertising the covered market. The Council seems now to 'turn a blind eye' to 'A' boards altogether – with no thought for the needs of disabled people. In general, pavements are becoming more cluttered – for us a real disincentive to attempt to go out.

John Wells

Have you got something you want to get off your chest? Feel free to get in touch to let us know.

Articles printed here do not necessarily represent
Unlimited's official view.

Any recommendation/advice must be independently
checked *before* going ahead.

A letter to Unlimited from Oxford University's Accessibility Adviser, Naill Strawson

Hello,

I am Niall and my job is make sure the University buildings are fully accessible to students and visitors. We have noticed the proliferation of A boards esp. along George Street as the main thoroughfare into town and thus the University. As I'm sure you are aware A boards are a nuisance for wheelchair and scooter users, and the visually impaired.

I have approached the council who have passed on some documentation about licencing and what is allowed and what isn't. The response about policing from the council was very much 'we would if we could'. Their resources are limited and this is a low priority.

I think it would be a great improvement to the disabled community in Oxford if the streets were tidier and more inclusive! What do you think?

Thanks, Niall

niall.strawson@admin.ox.ac.uk

Join the Crew

In voluntary organisations, a general rule is that only a very small percentage of the members actually take an active part in what the organisation is doing. If Unlimited was a ship, and only 5% of the people on board actually pulled on the oars, we would have 20 people keeping us going. In fact, only 6 of us are actually pulling on the oars, that's 1½ percent, with another 1 percent coming on board to help occasionally.

Like you, most of us are disabled and we are all on volunteers. Most importantly, we believe that we can make a difference. We can make it easier to live with a disability in Oxfordshire. We know that services can be improved, buildings can be modified, and attitudes can be changed, and with enough people Unlimited can make it happen. What's more, all of us will benefit.

So I'm asking all members - will you give a hand and join the people pulling on the oars? I believe you could. It's where I started nearly 50 years ago and only a couple of years after I broke my neck. Somebody in a disability organisation asked me if I would help them. I said yes! Now I'm asking you!

We are dedicated to improving the lives of physically and sensory disabled people and we have made some good changes, but there is so much more that we could do if we had more hands on deck.

Peter Hindshaw
Chair

Christ Church meadow



Rose Lane kissing gate to Christ Church Meadows

When I saw the article in the last Unlimited newsletter I thought I would get in touch given my experience of trying to enter Christ Church meadow as a wheelchair user. To most people in Oxford, Christ Church meadow is a delightful green space near the city centre with the added benefit of providing a short cut on foot from Magdalen Bridge (via Rose Lane Gate) to St Aldates and vice versa. If you're a wheelchair user, however, things are somewhat different. There is no problem with wheelchair access from St Aldates through the Memorial Garden: indeed, there is a ramped entrance on which a considerable amount of money has clearly been spent. At the Rose Lane entrance, however, entry to the meadow is through a turnstile in order to prevent cyclists from using this as a short cut to St Aldates.

In April last year, my GP surgery organised a Health Walk for patients and staff. The route from Iffley Road led into, and round, the meadow via the Rose Lane gate and thence back to Iffley Road. This would have made a good Health Wheel were it not for the turnstile.

Following the walk, the chairman of the surgery Patient Participation Group and I separately contacted Christ Church College suggesting that a RADAR-key operated lock be fitted to the gate next to the turnstile, so that wheelchair users have a chance to enjoy the meadow on an equal basis to everybody else. So far, the college has declined to move forward on this, and I found their reply to my letter very disappointing. Firstly, they fear that local cyclists would purchase RADAR keys via the internet and start cycling through the meadow. Secondly, the cost, which they suspect might be "some thousands of pounds". (I was invited to make a "significant donation" towards this!)

It would be interesting to find out from any landowners who have enabled wheelchair access to their property with a RADAR lock if they have encountered any examples of abuse. I contacted the National Trust to see what they had to say about making their older properties accessible to wheelchair users and any experience they had of controlling access with RADAR keys, but unfortunately their first response was a little disappointing in that they suggested I contact all the National Trust properties local to Oxfordshire to find out what they did. I am waiting to hear from them if they have a national policy.

Neil Hicks
Unlimited member, Oxford

A personal message from the Chair of Unlimited...

On 15 January 1966 aged just 20, I made a stupid decision; I got into a car that was being driven by someone who clearly wasn't fit to drive. Within a couple of miles there were two wrecked cars and three injured people. I broke my neck, very nearly died, and became substantially paralysed. Thus, I was deprived of far more than half of the experiences and opportunities that life offers most people and given a whole lot of new ones that no one in their right mind would want. Despite that, and with the help of some wonderful people and organisations, I have enjoyed a good life and a few weeks ago I quietly celebrated my half century of survival with family.



There are two points to take from this. Firstly, alcohol and driving are a disastrous combination and should be avoided, even prevented, at all costs. Secondly, it is possible to survive a life shattering trauma quite successfully and happily; you just need to make the choice to do it.

During my rehabilitation in particular, and at various subsequent times, I have gained huge support and knowledge from voluntary associations I have either turned to for assistance, or have joined to play a part in. The most recent, Unlimited, has been part of my life for the last seven years and I have done my best to put back much of the good stuff that I have learnt. I want Unlimited to lighten the burden of disability that so many bear and provide the kind of support from which I benefited so much. It's a 'together' thing: with your cooperation we can make it work for everyone.

But, every day in one way or another, sometimes fleetingly, sometimes all day, I am reminded that life wasn't supposed to be like this. It never leaves you - ever!

Peter Hindshaw
Chair

Frideswide Square, Oxford – what do you think of the new layout?



Frideswide Square from Oxford Hotel end

For those of you who live or work in Oxford or shop in the city centre, you will have encountered the roadworks by the station, in the area known as Frideswide Square. Not only have these been inconvenient but many disabled people, including Unlimited members, have been worried about the safety of the new layout, and how accessible it would be for us. Now the works have finished Oxford Transport and Access Group (OXTRAG) has carried out an access assessment and have written a full report of their findings, sending it to Oxfordshire County Council.

Overall OXTRAG feel that the concerns raised by disabled and elderly people for the completed 'gateway to Oxford' don't seem to have been taken into account in the final design. There is a lot of concern whether people will feel confident in the use of the square.

The site does look very level and flush surfaces will help people using mobility aids such as wheelchairs and scooters move around independently. However uniform surfaces over such a large area make the site extremely difficult for people with mobility or sensory difficulties to get around without assistance. They need guides such as tactile paving, signs and audible signals.

Shared use spaces

OXTRAG are concerned that mixing cycles and people with sensory difficulties on pavements will endanger pedestrians. They think that signage needs to be improved all over the square. This will alert drivers of pedestrian priority and separate cycles from pedestrians. Quite often drivers and cyclists assume they have priority in shared spaces and this attitude needs to be addressed. OXTRAG have recommended that cycles and pedestrians should be separated; there is space to offer a safe route to each group.

Crossing without assistance

There are no signal controlled crossing points. The photograph shows a crossing point in the new layout. When OXTRAG did their assessment vehicle drivers did not seem to know that this is a pedestrian priority zone, so failed to stop at crossing points. Three guide dog owners waited for 7 vehicles to pass before one stopped. Two guide dog users have experienced over 40 vehicles passing before they could cross these roads despite showing drivers a long

cane and using an assistance dog.

On some crossings the depth of tactile paving is not sufficient, and in other places crossings are too narrow. All across the site the tactile paving lacks tonal contrast (two obvious different colours of paving should be used).

People with sight loss are however not alone in having difficulty crossing roads. Deaf people, wheelchair users and those who use walking aids, have lower limb or learning difficulties could find it problem getting around Frideswide Square.

OXTRAG have made many sensible practical suggestions for solutions to the problems they have identified. It will be interesting to see how many changes are made by the Council.

Local coffee mornings and drop-ins

Sadly we were not able to continue the Unlimited coffee café at the Peachcroft Christian Centre but we hope you enjoy visiting one or more of these groups if you fancy meeting up with other people. We suggest you ring before you set off.

Mobility Café,
St Nicholas Church, Market Place, Abingdon OX14 3HF
Every Thursday 10.30 – 12noon
Laura 07827 235429

Over 50's drop-in
35 Ock Street, Abingdon
Next meeting 17th March, 7th and 21st April
David 01235 533373

Abingdon Stroke Club
Church Centre, Conduit Road, Abingdon
Second and fourth Monday each month 2-4pm (not bank holidays)
Stephanie 01865 736283 (evenings only)

Botley Stroke Club
The Kings Centre, Botley
Sue for more details 01865 204486

Wallingford Stroke Group
Crowmarsh Gifford Village Hall, Benson Lane, Crowmarsh Gifford, OX10 8ED
Every Thursday 2-4pm
Norman 01235 834503

Remembering Steve

Steve Vinnicombe, a tetraplegic for 47 years, and known to some of the older members of Unlimited, died in the JR on 31st of January after a short illness. He was the well-respected final chairman of Oxfordshire Council of Disabled People, a forerunner of Unlimited, and was well known in disabled circles. He was a founder member of the Wallingford and District Access Committee. He had worked energetically for many years to improve society for disabled people and will be sorely missed.

He was buried in Cholsey on Sunday 24th on January 2016.

Powerchair football

Ibrar Khan lives near the Cowley Road and is a wheelchair user. Here he tells us about powerchair football, his passion.



Ibrar Khan - Oxford Mail

"I decided to join Unlimited after kindly being invited by Peter (Unlimited chair).

In my spare time I am a volunteer coach at Oxford City Football Club. Although I was doing well coaching, I always wanted to include people with physical disabilities also.

Thankfully I was put in touch with the WFA (Wheelchair Football Association), by a colleague.

I attended a course on how to coach powerchair football. We thought as a club, why can't we start our own club in Oxfordshire?

I am currently the assistant coach to the team which is based at our new indoor site in Berinsfield.

The positive feedback I have received from members that have attended sessions suggests to me that it's not simply about football. It's about people who have disabilities having a social outlet, through which they can make new friendships and find out about other organisations they may be interested in; such as Unlimited.

I would encourage anyone who is interested to either get in touch with Oxford City FC or the WFA directly at www.thewfa.org.uk

Thanks Ibrar for sharing with us.

Are you a veteran, or do you know one?

Blind Veterans UK provides vital services and support to ex-Service men and women who are now battling severe sight loss.

The charity currently supports 32 veterans in Oxfordshire. In total across the whole UK, Blind Veterans UK actively supports over 4,000 Armed Forces and National Service veterans living with severe sight loss and a further 3,000 other beneficiaries many of whom are carers and family members.

The charity provides its beneficiaries with free support and services, such as rehabilitation and training,

The charity's No One Alone campaign is reaching out to the tens of thousands of ex-Service men and women who are now battling severe sight loss and who could be eligible for support but do not currently realise it. Regardless of how a veteran lost their sight or when they served, Blind Veterans UK can help. Find out more at: www.noonealone.org.uk or telephone: 0800 389 7979

One Small Step and Disabled Access Day

Saturday March 12th. Come and join us on Cowley Road.

March 12th is Disabled Access Day and Unlimited will be having a stall on the Cowley Road, East Oxford. This is part of our One Small Step project to encourage shops, cafes and other business on Cowley Road to be more accessible to disabled people – whether they are wheelchair users, have assistance dogs or are hard of hearing.

We wrote about the One Small Step project in our last newsletter, describing the survey carried out by Unlimited members and Age UK volunteers last summer to find which shops and cafes were easy to get into and which could do better.



One Small Step survey team, Ruth Curtis left and Dave Holmes (far right) with Age UK volunteers on Cowley Road

On March 12th we will be handing out 'how to' factsheets to businesses to help them make their buildings as accessible as possible. We know it isn't always easy if you run a small business and need to make a profit so we are going to offer simple solutions where possible. We will also be giving shoppers a factsheet so they know what they should expect from accessible premises.

We could really do with your help on the day, just for an hour between 11am and 3pm, to help hand out leaflets and be the friendly face of Unlimited on our stall. Get in touch with us on 0800 04408192 and ask for Ruth, or you can email on info@unltdox.org.uk

Disabled Access Day is the idea of Euan's Guide, a website which helps disabled people find accessible places to visit and stay on their holidays. You can look at what they have found to do in Oxford here www.euansguide.com



Remembering Mark Stone



Photo - Oxford Mail

Mark Stone was a disability activist and member of Unlimited. Sadly, he died in February. Like most with motor neurone disease (MND) he knew his days were numbered yet he ignored that inevitability and with charm and persuasiveness worked to improve our community for disabled people.

Mark was diagnosed with MND in January 2012. In his working life he was employed in the health and social care sector. He continued working hard, just with a different focus and purpose; he helped a group of disabled people to create a new social enterprise and worked with HealthWatch Oxfordshire. He remained active within the NHS too as a Patient Partner on a range of bodies and committees. Mark was a Trustee of the MND Association, bringing to it a breadth of specialised experience from his career but also direct experience of living with MND.

Mark lobbied in Parliament on access to Continuing Healthcare for people with MND and locally in Oxford for a specialist neuro physio post to avoid emergency admissions for people with MND. Mark was a regular contributor on BBC Radio Oxford and in 2015 he was interviewed by Jeremy Vine for Radio 2. He read a poem he had written:

*snip, you can't keep up with your family in the street;
snip, you can't control your foot against the rip at the beach;
snip, you can't drive;
snip, you can't do the stairs without using the banisters;
snip, you're no longer safe in the shower;
snip, you need crutches outside;
snip, you can no longer visit your parents' house;
snip, you can't get to your kids' rooms;
snip, you're breathless every time you walk;
snip, you need a wheelchair;
snip, you can't get into a normal car;
snip, you can't get into your own house;
snip, snip, snip...*

The One Small Step project to improve access in Cowley Road was originated by him and was initially supported by Age UK. It has now been taken up by Unlimited.

Our thoughts are with Mark's family and friends.

Oxfordshire Health Inequalities Commission - Have your say

Health inequalities are differences that affect people's health because of social, geographical, biological or other factors. These differences have a huge impact as they result in people who are worst off experiencing poorer health and shorter lives. The causes of health inequalities include poverty, housing and education as well as the lifestyle of individual people. Disabled people often have health inequalities because they are more likely to be unemployed and find it difficult to access services.

The Health Inequalities Commission in Oxfordshire has been set up to research what needs to be done to reduce health inequalities in the county. Members of the Commission come from the Oxford City Council, HealthWatch, a local GP, the University Hospitals Foundation Trust, Mind and Age UK. The independent Chair is Professor Sian Griffin.

The Commission will consider what actions could be taken in Oxfordshire which would result in health inequalities being reduced long-term. In particular, it will focus on how we can improve the delivery of health and social care services so that they are accessible to all the different communities in the county.

You can have your say in this research. The Commission has started holding evidence sessions in public, each one looking at specific services. There are two sessions which Unlimited members could still submit evidence to:

11 April, 9.30 to 12.30pm at the Rose Hill Centre in Oxford. The theme is 'ageing well'; submissions are invited on older people's health and inequalities issues and living with dementia. Deadline for submissions is 29 March.

23 May, 9.30 to 12.30pm in the Council Chamber at Oxford Town Hall in Oxford. The session will be based on cross cutting themes and challenges including housing, education, rural living, poverty etc. Deadline for submissions is 6 May.

For information about how to submit evidence call 07919 346547, or send an email to cscsu.talkinghealth@nhs.net or visit the website www.oxfordshireccg.nhs.uk and click on /about-us/work-programmes/health-inequalities-commission/

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

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

Tel: 0800 044 8192 @Unlimited_Ox

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