

TRAILBLAZERS

Part of the Young Campaigners Network



INCLUSION NOW

The Muscular Dystrophy Campaign's Trailblazers

is a pressure group run by young people for young people - two hundred campaigners aged between 16 and 30 are fighting for the rights of disabled people across the UK.

In 2009 the *Trailblazers* carried out investigations into three areas identified as having the most significant impact on the lives of young disabled people. The findings from these investigations have been brought together to form the *Inclusion Now* campaign.

The *Trailblazers* undertook investigations into three areas and published three hard-hitting reports on:

- public transport - *End of the Line*
- education - *University Challenge*
- leisure facilities - *Calling Time*

All three investigations attracted significant media coverage and generated parliamentary debate.

TRAILBLAZERS' HIGHLIGHTS

- The *Trailblazers* have featured in over 400 media articles and 65 young campaigners have been interviewed for national and local TV or radio.
- *Trailblazers'* investigations have triggered parliamentary debates, meetings with Ministers and appointments with transport providers and universities.
- The *Trailblazers* ran a clearing hotline for disabled students on A-level results day 2009 to help identify universities with the best accessibility.
- The *Trailblazers* have run workshops and presentations for campaigning groups, government advisory committees and transport watchdogs.
- Nearly thirty *Trailblazers* have gained work experience at the Muscular Dystrophy Campaign's office in London.
- The *Trailblazers* are award winners - they picked up accolades including the v Shout Award, the Sue Barker President's Awards, the Bank of America Local Heroes Award and were shortlisted by Radar for its People of the Year Awards.

"Trailblazers is a great opportunity for me to get my voice heard on the issues that matter to me. I have the chance to meet other young campaigners and tell politicians what I think about the services in Cornwall. I plan to raise awareness and campaign on the issue of shops and restaurants not providing better facilities for people who need disabled access."
Wayne Lenson, St. Columb, Cornwall



"I joined Trailblazers because I want to meet people who face similar challenges and to help them achieve their goals. I see no reason why young disabled people should not realise their hopes and dreams."
Dave Gale, Carlisle



"As well as having the chance to campaign on the things that are most important to me, Trailblazers gives me an opportunity to make friends with people who have similar interests."
Judith Merry, Aylesbury

ACCESS TO PUBLIC TRANSPORT

END OF THE LINE

Access to **public transport** for young disabled people in Britain continues to frustrate and disappoint service users. In 2009, four years after the passing of the Disability Discrimination Act of 2005, young people with muscle disease travelling on a bus, a train, the London underground network or in a taxi continue to find themselves unable to use services that, **by law**, should be available to all. In response to this, the *Trailblazers* launched an investigative report, **End of the Line**, into the state of public transport in the UK.

WHAT WE DID

Trailblazers from around the UK carried out 190 mystery commuter surveys on buses, trains, the underground and taxis. We also carried out surveys at train and bus stations and wrote blogs, ran focus groups and made film reports.

KEY FINDINGS

- Wheelchair users have less choice when using public transport and as a result are forced to pay more than their non disabled peers.
- Young disabled passengers often feel like second class citizens on public transport through a combination of unreliable technology, poor disability awareness among staff and inaccessible stations.
- Young disabled passengers cannot always access the first bus, train or taxi that arrives at a station or stop.
- The Assisted Passenger Registration Service (24 hour advance booking) for trains restricts the spontaneity and independence of disabled passengers and fails to provide a reliable service that passengers have confidence in.
- Non-wheelchair users with mobility difficulties also faced serious problems when attempting to use buses and trains. Bus drivers often fail to park next to the kerb, meaning *Trailblazers* have a greater distance to climb into the bus. Drivers can pull away from stops too quickly before a passenger is seated and safe.

ACTION NEEDED

We are calling on the Government, local authorities and public transport providers to:

- ensure that accessibility on all modes of public transport, including air travel, is at the heart of all public transport planning, not merely a concept to pay lip service to;
- ensure that, until such time when all trains can be boarded and disembarked independently, the Assisted Passenger Reservation Service is improved to guarantee that all disabled passengers receive a universally high standard of service;
- conduct a major review of accessibility on buses and coaches across the UK;
- ensure that taxi subsidy cards are available for disabled passengers with a discount that reflects the dependence many disabled people have on them.

"It's really just a case of equality of service. Why should any disabled person have to wait around for assistance or have to ring 24 hours in advance to use a station?"

Stephen Liney, Aylesbury

"The Equality and Human Rights Commission welcomes and applauds Trailblazers and the current campaign to promote access to public transport."

The Equality and Human Rights Commission

"So many times I've been denied access on public transport because of my condition. Most people find it is easy to get around and be independent but when you have a disability simple tasks like this can be extremely difficult. Whether it's buses, trains or tubes, there's always some kind of problem. I know I'm not the only one who's experienced this."

Judith Merry, Buckinghamshire

"It's all well and good to hunt down the man with the ramp while on the platform, but once you're on the train what goes on at the arriving end platform side is completely out of your hands - bad communication or forgetful staff result in you not getting off the train! I feel that these experiences make you feel a huge lack in confidence with this service."

Colin Rabbich, Morecambe

ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION

UNIVERSITY CHALLENGE

In an increasingly crowded job market academic qualifications have become more important in securing employment.

In 2002 the Department for Work and Pensions found that non-disabled people were twice as likely to have studied in higher education as disabled people. The same report revealed that 44% of all disabled people were economically active, compared with 79% of non-disabled people. If you are disabled you are less likely to have studied at university and also less likely to be in employment. For disabled people to be able to achieve their economic potential and fully contribute to the national economy, it is essential that higher education is accessible to all.

In response to this the *Trailblazers* launched **University Challenge**, an investigative report and guide into support and accessibility at university.

WHAT WE DID

The *Trailblazers* contacted the UK's top 100 universities to ask them about how their facilities and services are adapted to ensure disabled students have the same chance as their non-disabled peers of achieving academic success.

The *Trailblazers* also combined their diverse experience of applying for and studying at university to put together a collection of top tips for a smooth, productive and enjoyable time in higher education.

KEY FINDINGS

- The Clearing System disadvantages disabled students as it leaves them less than a month to choose their preferred course and university as well as investigate access, accommodation and arrange care.
- One in ten disabled students will not have accessible accommodation, and cooking and dining facilities that are fully integrated into mainstream university life.
- One in four universities does not have rooms available for personal assistants, which could force disabled students to live at home rather than with their fellow students.
- Thirty percent of inter-campus transport is not accessible to disabled students.
- One in ten universities admits that they do not have good links with local care agencies and support services.
- Only 12 percent of the top 100 university websites could provide all the information requested.

ACTION NEEDED

We are calling on the Government, local authorities and universities and colleges to:

- recognise the importance of an engaged disability officer to make the transition to university as smooth as possible. All universities must prioritise at least one person in this role so disabled students receive expert advice and support at a potentially stressful and uncertain time;
- guarantee that no student will be unable to study a course (that they have the qualifications and academic background to study) on the grounds of their disability;
- guarantee full funding for the increased care needed when a young disabled person leaves home and goes to university so they can study where they choose, without being reliant on family for care;
- ensure disabled students have the same level of choice as non-disabled students when choosing their university accommodation;
- guarantee the provision of free accommodation for personal assistants, required by disabled students who need 24-hour care;
- ensure that all inter-campus university transport is accessible to all students;
- provide assistance and support for disabled students who need to hire personal assistants;
- ensure all university and college websites have fully comprehensive and accessible information via their websites for disabled students.

"I very much welcome this important report. A university education is often the route to good careers and disabled people should have the same opportunities as others. There has been much progress with more universities enabling disabled people to enjoy the full student experience but, as this research shows, we have a long way to go before disabled people have the same choices as other students take for granted. The Muscular Dystrophy Campaign has made a contribution to ensuring this end by undertaking this work."
Sir Bert Massie, former Chair of the Disability Rights Commission

"Studying at university when you are a disabled student is no different than studying as a non-disabled student. The social life is brilliant, the courses are great and your fellow students will be completely accepting and open to you. Just make sure that you have all your needs sorted out well in advance."
Zoe Hallam, Oxford University

ACCESS TO LEISURE FACILITIES

CALLING TIME

Since 2 December 1996 it has been unlawful for service providers to treat disabled people less favourably for a reason related to disability.

We wanted to assess the picture today. How accessible is the leisure industry? Do disabled young disabled feel they have the same access to leisure opportunities as their non disabled peers? We wanted to uncover examples of particularly good and bad practice.

Ultimately, how stressful is relaxing?

WHAT WE DID

Over one hundred *Trailblazers* from across the UK have spent two months researching and collating evidence on the problems faced by young disabled people when they try to use leisure facilities such as pubs, clubs, cinemas, theatres, sports facilities and museums. We also surveyed 80 leisure venues, carried out interviews, wrote blogs and filmed our investigations.

"There is so much out there for able-bodied people to indulge in, with regards to sport, dance and leisure facilities, yet nothing of the same nature for us. It appears, in my experience, that people seem to think that just because we can't get up, run around and chase a ball, we don't want to. Of course we do! Our bodies may be different but our minds are not!

We are not useless: we can join in and most importantly, we want to. So why not plan new developments, leisure centres, clubs and activities with us in mind as well."

Carrie Aimes, Worcester

"I've been in situations where bouncers query my right to use a disabled toilet because I don't use a wheelchair. They also accuse me of being drunk because of the way I walk. Disability awareness is very important and I wish more people working in the leisure industry understood that."

Stephen Liney, Aylesbury

KEY FINDINGS

- Four out of five young disabled people do not feel confident that they can pursue a leisure activity spontaneously.
- Four out of five young disabled people have experienced difficulties using a leisure facility because they are a disabled person.
- Four out of five thought that the accessibility of leisure facilities in their area was average, poor or very poor.
- Two out of five young disabled people perceived the accessibility of leisure facilities in their area as poor or very poor.
- Four out of five young disabled people surveyed felt that most people who work for leisure pursuit organisations did not understand the issues disabled people face

ACTION NEEDED

We are calling on Government, local authorities to ensure that:

- all small businesses have access to funding and expert advice from young disabled people, so they are able to make adjustments that will make their buildings fully accessible;
- a proper accessibility audit is carried out on all venues that apply for licenses for catering, entertainment or retail and applications are rejected if a venue cannot provide disabled customers with a fully accessible service;
- all employees receive relevant and practical disability training with opportunity to meet young disabled people to find out what is important to them;
- accessibility and comfort for disabled people is at the heart of all future developments at leisure venues.

SUMMARY

The *Inclusion Now* investigations show that, in spite of great achievements made in the passing of the Disability Discrimination Acts of 1995 and 2005, young disabled people continue to face discrimination and unequal access to the services, pursuits and opportunities they most want.

WHAT NEXT?

- Join *Trailblazers* www.muscular-dystrophy.org/trailblazers
- Tell the world and your local parliamentarian about your experiences accessing transport, further education and leisure through the *Trailblazers'* website and the media.
- Tell the world about your findings through the *Trailblazers* website, local and national media and politicians in your area.
- Work with the *Trailblazers* to fight the social exclusion of young disabled people and campaign for a more accessible UK.

GET INVOLVED

Take action, campaign, learn skills, make friends - join our thriving campaigning community.

Contact Bobby Ancil on **020 7803 4807**, email him at b.ancil@muscular-dystrophy.org or visit www.muscular-dystrophy.org/trailblazers

To find out more about the Muscular Dystrophy Campaign call **0800 652 6352** (freephone) email info@muscular-dystrophy.org or visit www.muscular-dystrophy.org

**Muscular
Dystrophy
Campaign**

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