

Llanelli Disabled Access Group

The Social Model of Disability Explained

Introduction

More and more disabled people are talking about the social model of disability. For many, understanding it has changed their lives. LDAG sees it as its guiding philosophy, but it is still widely misunderstood. This page aims to explain the social model of disability in a way that is easy to understand.

This page serves as an introduction to these concepts. They are usually explored in more detail on disability equality training courses.

The social model of disability has changed many people's outlook on life - and it could change yours. If, after reading this, you would like to talk to people whose lives have been dramatically enhanced as a result of the social model, please contact LDAG.

A different way of looking at ourselves

The social model of disability enables disabled people to look at themselves in a more positive way that increases their self-esteem and **independence**.

Disabled people often feel a loss, for all the things they would like to do, but cannot; a loss of goals and dreams that seem unobtainable. Disabled people often feel they are a burden on family and friends, and a problem for doctors who cannot cure them.

This traditional view of disability is called “the Medical Model of Disability”, because it sees people as medical problems. As a result disabled people are expected to see their impairment as their problem, something they will have to make the best of and accept that there are many things they cannot do.

The social model of disability starts from a different perspective. It ignores how “bad” a person’s impairment is. Instead it establishes that everyone is equal and demonstrates that it is society that erects the barriers that prevent disabled people participating, thus restricting their opportunities.

How does the social model of disability work?

The social model looks beyond a person’s impairment at **all** the relevant factors that affect their ability to be a full and equal participant in society.

What else is relevant?

Heavy doors and inaccessible public transport are just two examples of what makes travelling such a hassle - not the fact that someone is disabled. Every disabled person can make their own list of the barriers that limit their participation. When these barriers and other people’s negative attitudes are considered, it is easy to see how disabled people’s opportunities are limited by a multitude of barriers.

The social model of disability states that the solution is to rid society of these barriers, rather than relying on curing all the people who have impairments. (in many case this is not possible or desirable)

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For example, people with poor eyesight are given a simple piece of equipment - a pair of glasses. Without them they would be excluded from full participation in society and would therefore be disabled.

Similarly, the social model solution to the fact that a wheelchair user is disabled because they cannot use public transport is simple - make all public transport accessible to everyone!

This social model approach to disability that sees the problem as society's barriers, rather than the person's condition, allows disabled people to lift the blame from their shoulders and place it squarely onto society's. The social model of disability empowers disabled people to challenge society to remove those barriers.