Accessibility personas

Accessible and Inclusive Tourism Toolkit for Businesses

These personas have been created with those who have lived experience of disability to portray the real experiences people with accessibility requirements have. As an organisation, you can use these to start to think about how the toolkit can be applied with real customers in mind.

VisitEngland™

Sarah

Sarah is an autistic mum of autistic grown up daughters and would describe herself as unfiltered, outspoken and a big supporter of the underdog. Sarah and her daughters have a support dog called Bruno.

As a business leader, Sarah has to travel for work which can be demanding. She admits she has 'little time for any form of self care' as she prioritises supporting her daughters' needs first. Taking time to relax is essential for Sarah.

Sarah excels at planning, but can have anxiety around unpredictability and the aspects of travel she cannot control. She often comes prepared with tools to manage over stimulation. However, sometimes even previously manageable journeys can become unmanageable from a sensory point of view if there are last minute changes or delays.

Last holiday in the UK

Sarah's last holiday was to a chalet with a hot tub in a rural woodland setting. This meant Sarah and her family could go for long dog walks, private spa-like experiences and have lots of bonding time. Sarah remembers great assistance dog acceptance at the local pub, and how clean and beautiful the accommodation was.
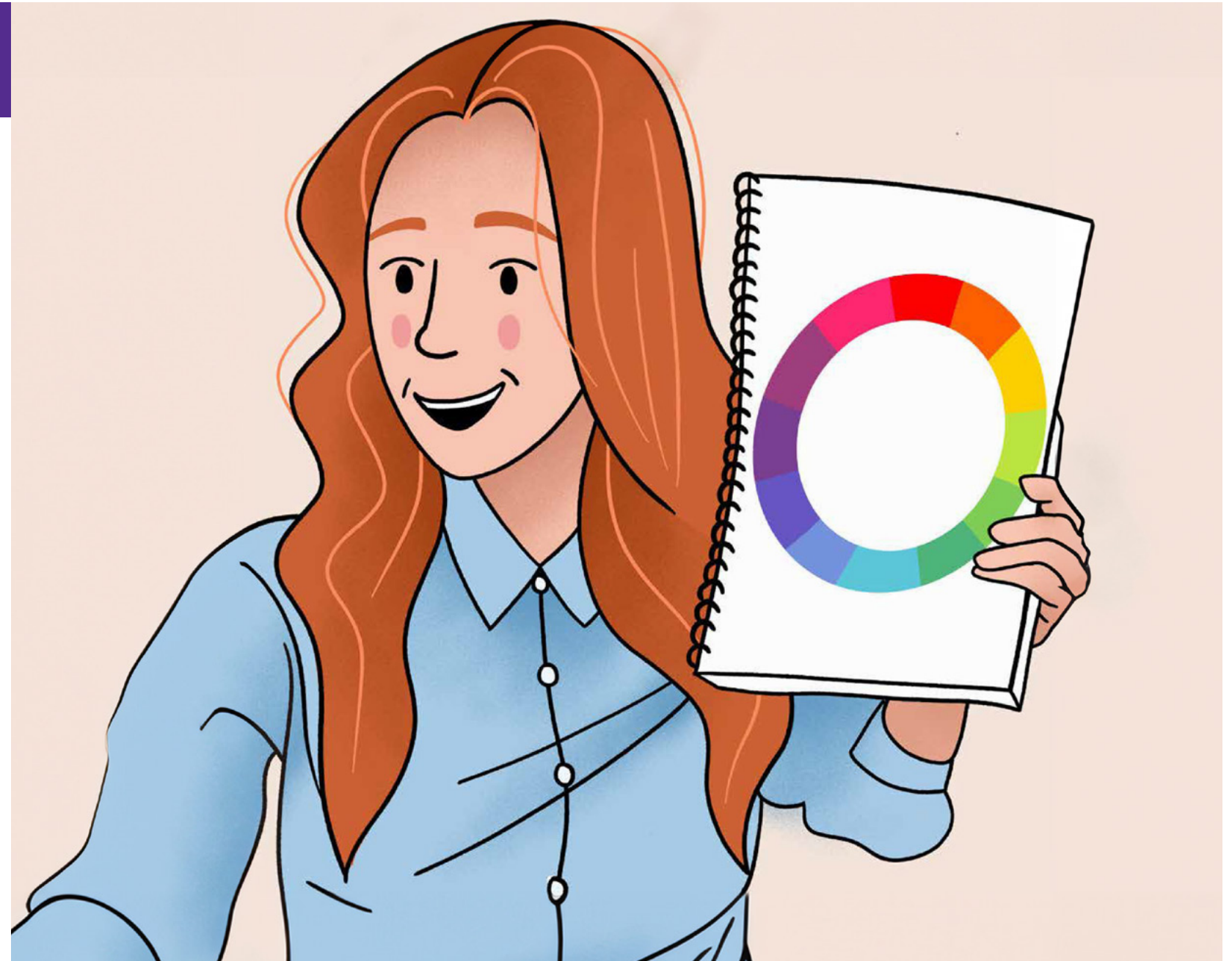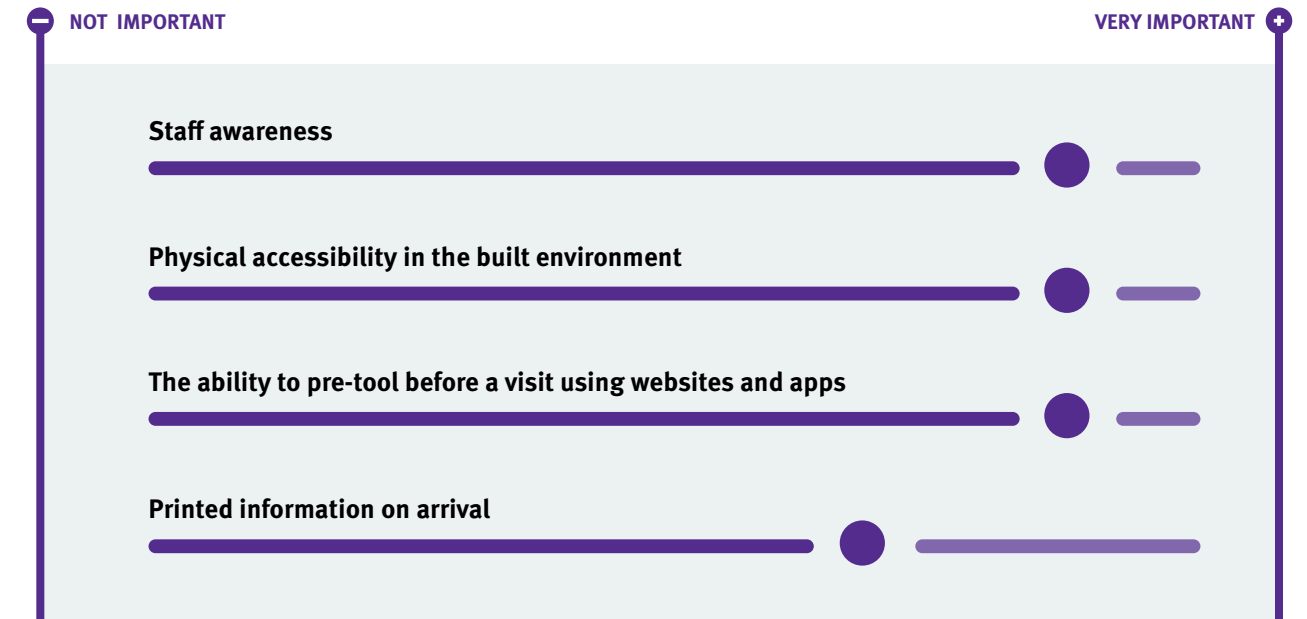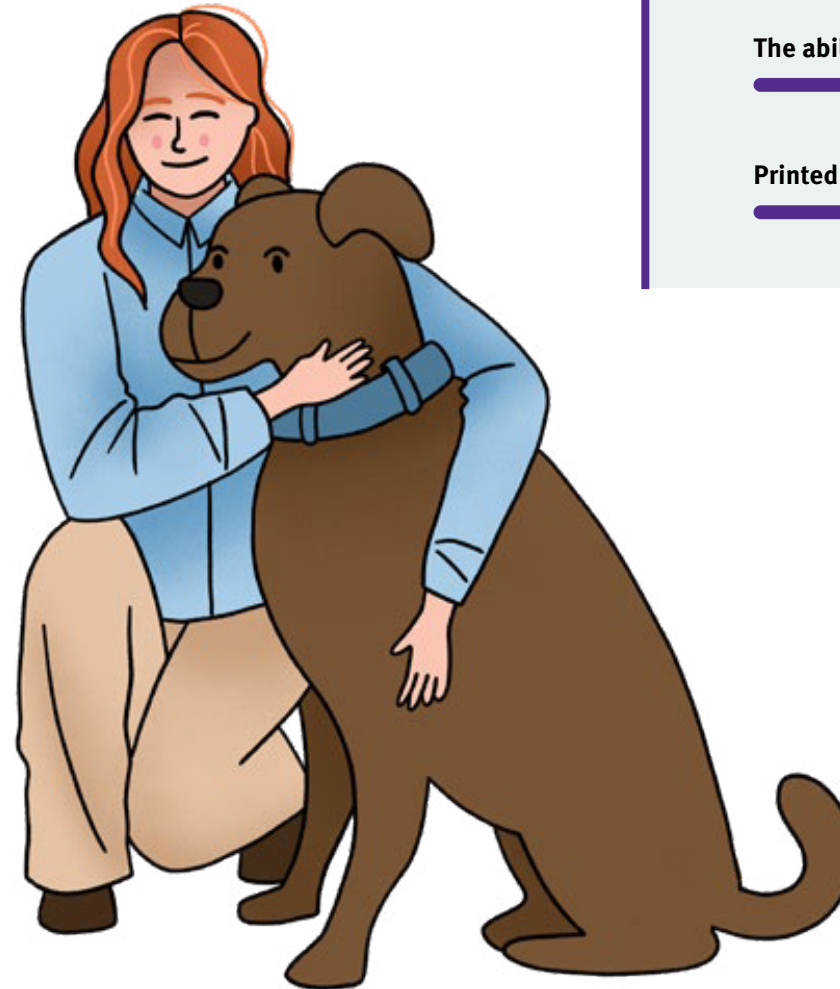
Frustrations

- Having to ask for 'pet fees' to be removed from a booking. There is often no option when booking for Sarah to say she is bringing an assistance dog.

- Having only phone calls as a contact method.

- This makes communication difficult for Sarah in some situations, especially when overwhelmed or anxious.

- When people talk to Sarah as if she is a child once she has disclosed her disability.

Tools

- Online booking sites, such as Booking.com and Airbnb.

- Sarah relies on reviews, using feedback from disabled people's good and bad experiences to decide whether or not to book. She also looks to see if businesses have any accessibility accreditations.

- Google Images and Google Maps help Sarah with pretooling and familiarisation before a visit.

I'm Sarah

NOT IMPORTANT   **VERY IMPORTANT**

Staff awareness

Physical accessibility in the built environment

The ability to pre-tool before a visit using websites and apps

Printed information on arrival

Highlights

- Accessibility information and disability representation on the venue's website.

- The contact details of an accessibility ambassador, and multiple ways to reach them.

- Complimentary carer tickets.

- Early boarding and seating to reduce stress when travelling.

- Easy to understand allergy advice on menus.

- Assurance that assistance dogs are welcome.

Ben and Tammy

Ben and Tammy describe themselves as easy to talk to, humorous, cultured but with zero time for snobbery or pretense. They have been married for 20+ years and often travel together.

Ben has cerebral palsy which affects his walking gait, coordination, speech and causes fatigue. He requires frequent dwell space and struggles to book assistance over the phone as staff can have trouble understanding him. At times, he uses a mobility scooter to get around.

Tammy is of shorter stature, and has difficulty with high desks, a lack of lower seating and steps without supportive handrails. For Tammy, the physical barriers are easier to overcome than the attitudinal barriers she often faces. It is not unusual for members of the public to stare and laugh at her. Ben and Tammy believe disability awareness training should be mandatory for all staff, especially those who are customer-facing.

Last holiday in the UK

Ben and Tammy recently stayed at a holiday park on the south coast and used this as a base to visit friends. They had fun, and spent lots of time with a friend that they hadn't seen for a while.
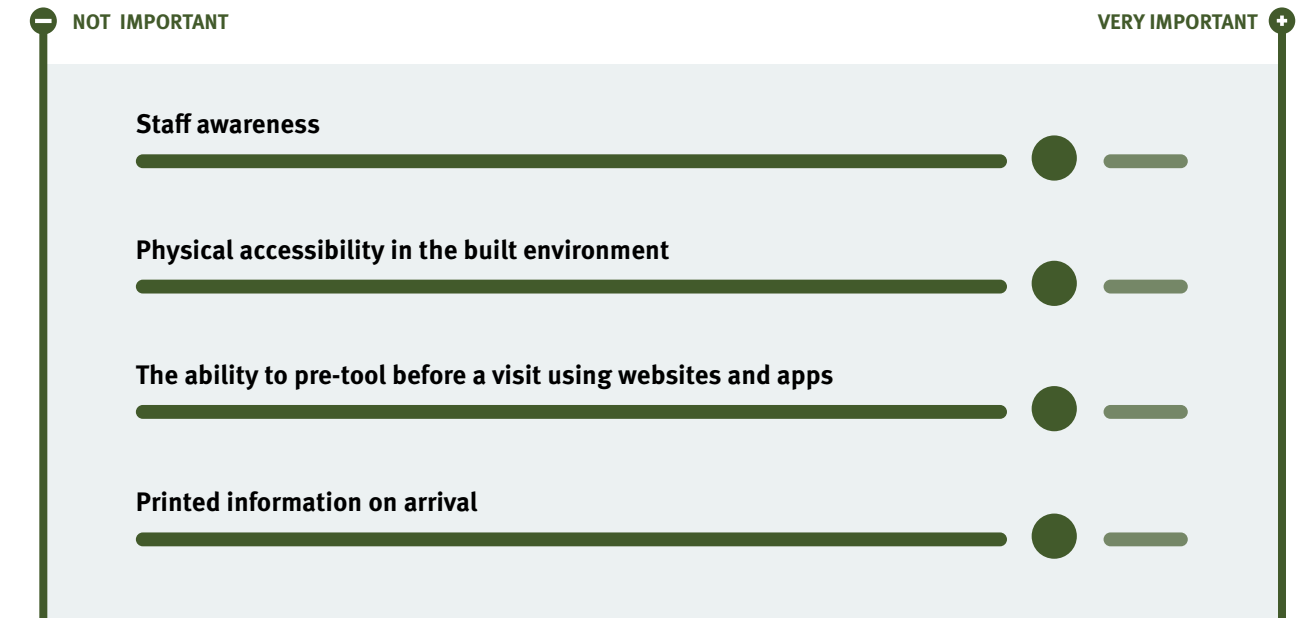
Frustrations

- Staff that are terrified to approach, or speak to Ben and Tammy in a patronising way.

- Unnecessary items that block access routes, such as street furniture.

- A lack of assistance which can restrict access to travel and attractions.

- Poor attitudes or a lack of care surrounding disability.

- Inaccurate and dishonest information, such as organisations promising an accessible facility that doesn't exist upon arrival.

- Places that hide behind accreditation and do not train their staff to manage real-life scenarios with empathy.

Tools

- Ben and Tammy use mobility aids and accessibility equipment to support them, so look for accessible features and facilities in all venues, attractions and accommodation types they visit.

- They also look for accessibility information on venue websites that answer specific questions, and appreciate being easily able to find the contact details of a staff member, if needed.

I'm Ben

NOT IMPORTANT

VERY IMPORTANT

Staff awareness

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Highlights

- Staff that listen and take direction as how to fulfil individual requirements, rather than simply assuming.

- A positive and flexible attitude. This can overcome many physical issues encountered in buildings.

- Concessions, such as free essential companion tickets. This is a great help to Ben and Tammy when finances are limited.

Asif

Asif often adjusts how he introduces himself depending on who he is communicating with. He is deaf and finds there is a great spectrum of awareness that people have of what he might need.

Asif and his partner are new parents and holidays have now changed, with more baby equipment coming on the journey too! Asif is an expert in finding places that have online booking facilities, and typically avoids those that require a phone call. He doesn't understand why more businesses don't offer online services as they have the potential to benefit staff members as well as customers.

There have been scenarios in the past - particularly in busy environments - where Asif has experienced overwhelm trying to process sounds and hear staff members. He relies on quiet spaces and noise-cancelling headphones to deal with particularly overwhelming environments.

Asif's nightmare would be having to figure out what to do in a busy public space, with his baby in tow, if there was a critical announcement that he couldn't hear.

Last holiday in the UK

On their most recent holiday, Asif and his family visited the coastal town of Oban and drove around the area to eat at different restaurants and walk within surrounding nature. "It's a different world compared to the busy cities that many of us are accustomed to, so it was refreshing but also eye-opening to visit a different style of living. I remember the feeling of being very relaxed and being surrounded by beautiful nature."
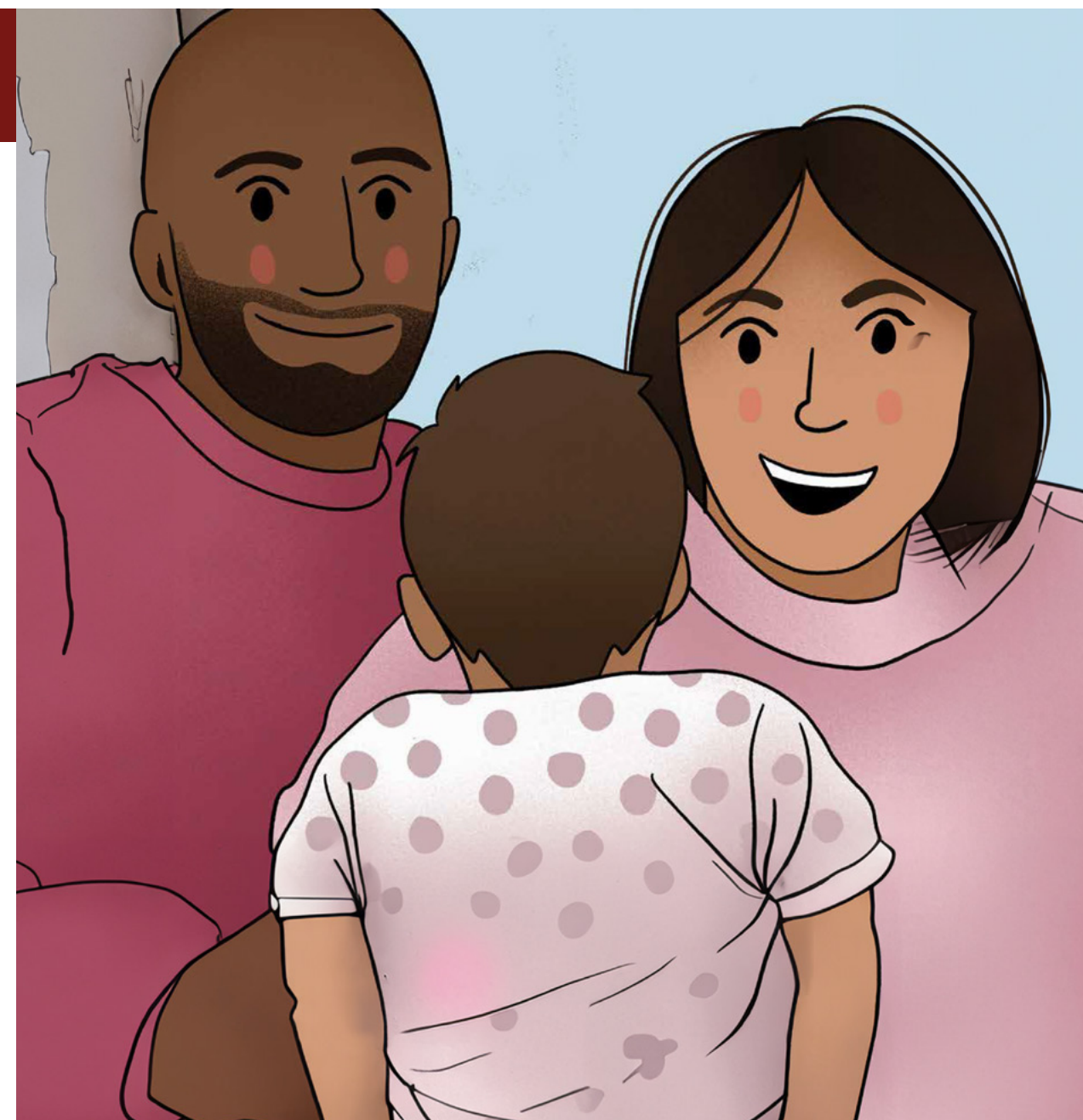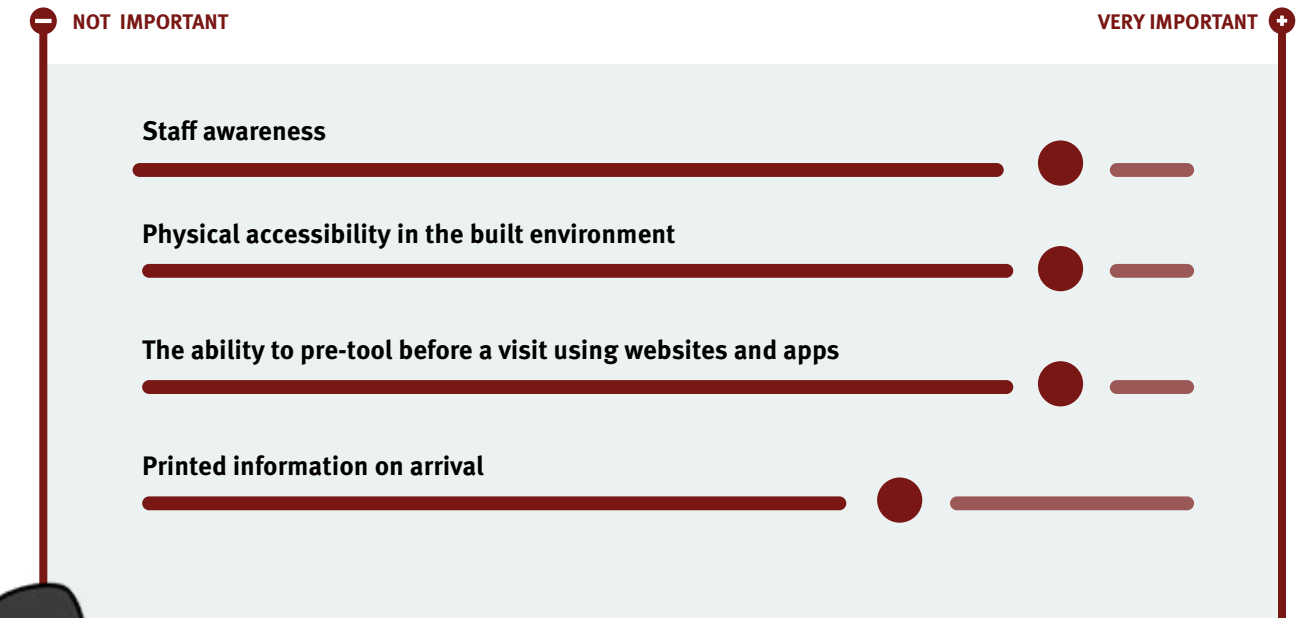
Frustrations

- Difficulty hearing hospitality staff, especially in noisy and busy settings when Asif can't lip-read.

- If the 'menu of the day' at a pub or restaurant is not written or visible anywhere.

- Loudspeakers that make announcements without written or visual feedback, including emergency announcements.

- Being forced to call to make, cancel or amend bookings, or to access room service when at his accommodation.

- No captions on videos, or only auto-captions being available. These are notoriously inaccurate and difficult to follow as opposed to closed captions.

- Larger businesses that have the resources to create high-quality content failing to caption their videos appropriately.

Tools

- Asif frequently utilises online booking systems and will choose businesses that offer this over any other.

- He looks for written information, such as facility descriptions, platform announcements and show times.

- Asif uses tools such as noise-cancelling headphones to manage noisy and potentially overwhelming environments.

- As a new dad, he is constantly on the look-out for places that advertise baby changing facilities.

I'm Asif

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Highlights

- The ability to find and use quiet spots to overcome any sensory overload. Asif regularly uses multi-faith rooms for prayers and a place for relaxation and meditation.

- Asif champions businesses that make it easy to communicate via email or online messaging platform. Being able to quickly 'chat' with a responsive staff member and ask questions on a platform where information stays in one place is something he particularly welcomes.
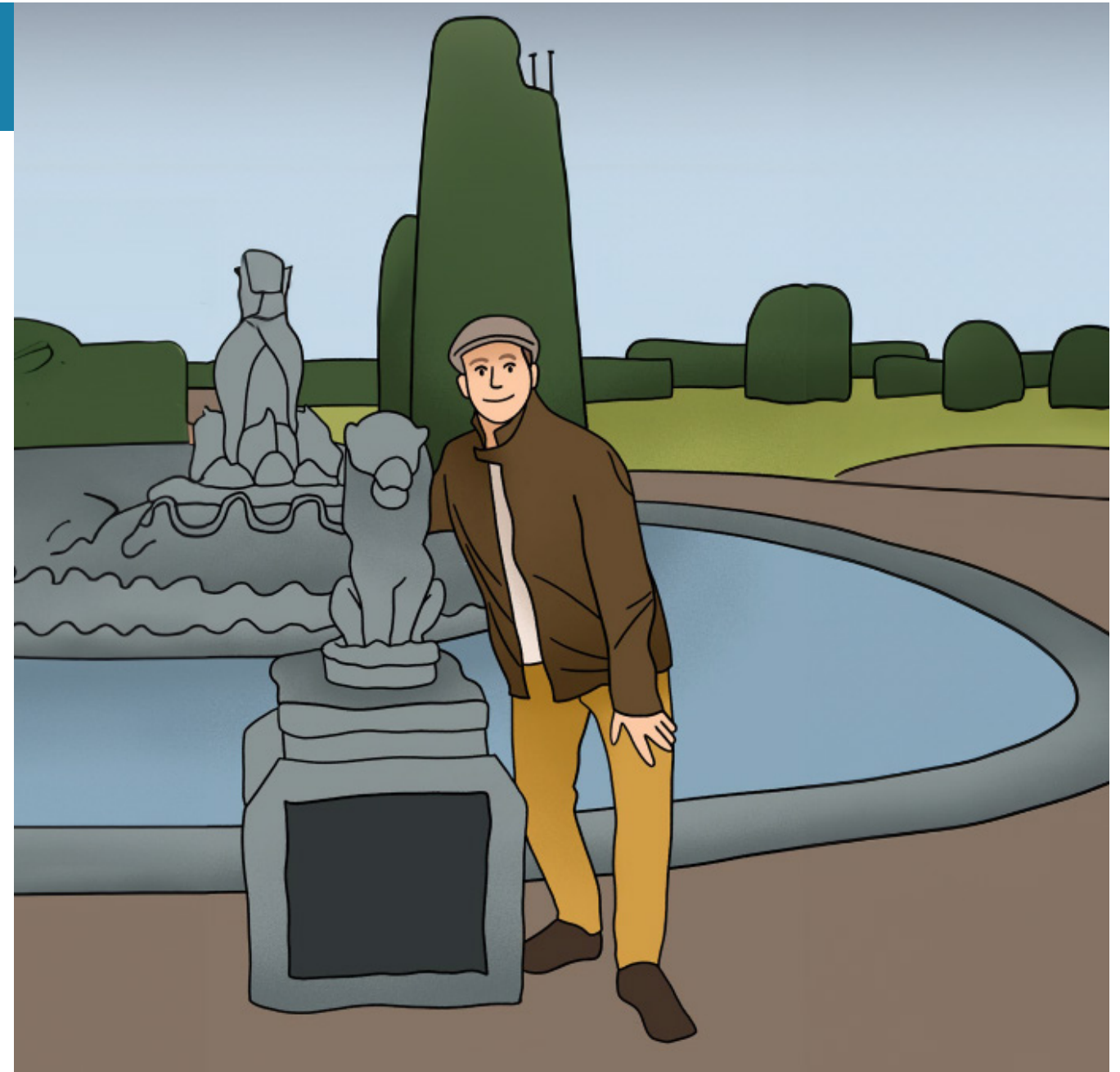
Craig

Craig specialises in science and technology and is passionate about digital accessibility. He has a PhD, co-founded a startup, and has an assistance dog called Bo. Craig completely lost his sight just before starting a physics degree, and now describes 'seeing' the world through a different lens.

Craig often travels with his partner and enjoys trying new things. Craig's partner has a mobility impairment, so they often look for a "safe space" that they can each manage and enjoy. "Now it's just us and our abilities/disabilities" Craig says, "We rely on how good facilities are, and how friendly the staff are." Craig will sometimes travel with his assistance dog and is conscious about making sure Bo is not left on her own for too long when he is out.

Craig can find it challenging to research holidays online with a lot of comparison information being visual. He feels he needs to go on holiday more often before he invests the time in learning different online tools, preferring to rely on the advice of friends.

Last holiday in the UK

Craig and his partner recently visited a spa hotel in Ashford as a birthday present. It was important that the surrounding scene was away from the noisy city but close enough for them to travel there via train and taxis. A few memorable moments included using a premium gender-neutral changing room. "This really improved our experience, especially that it wasn't labelled the 'disabled' changing room." Live music and a booth in the dining room made the holiday extra special. "We could hide in our little dinner booth instead of the typical restaurant layout."
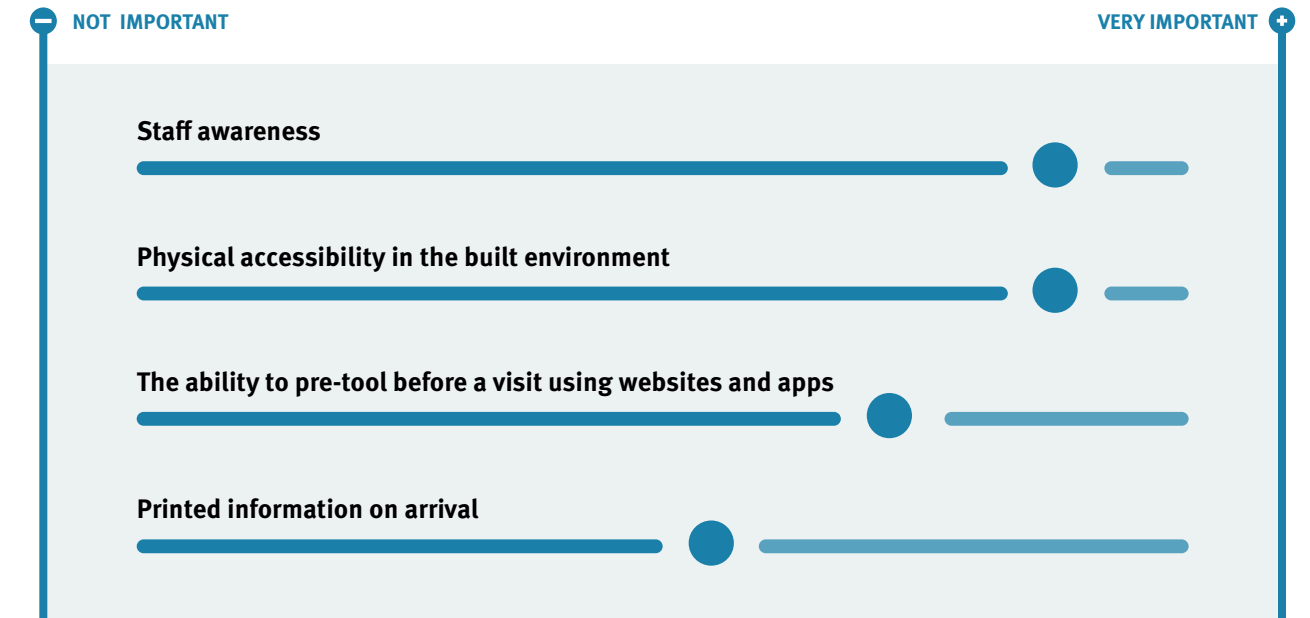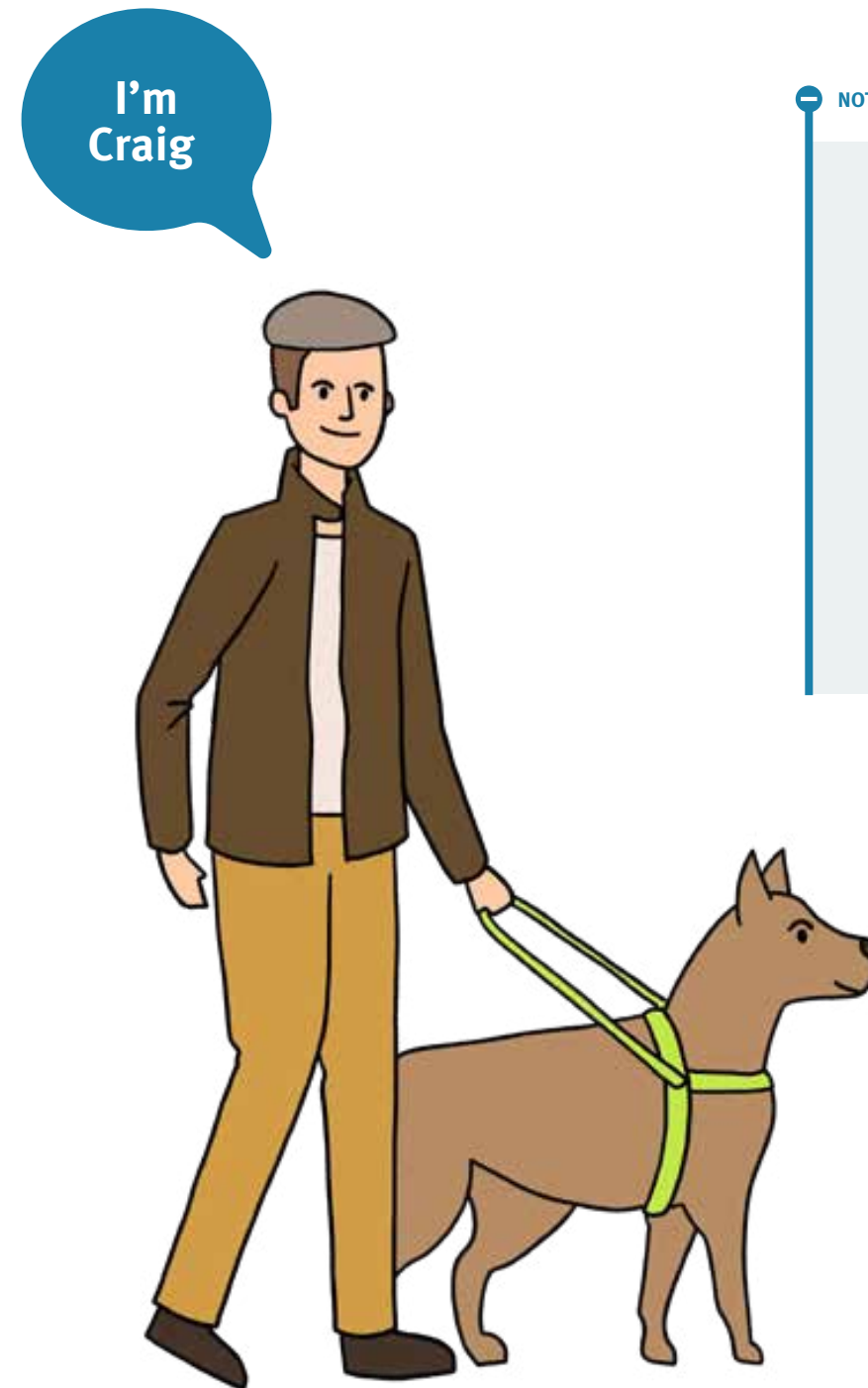
Frustrations

- Craig not being able to bring his assistance dog along when he travels. He doesn't want to leave Bo alone, so would also benefit from businesses placing more focus on activities being suitable for an assistance dog.

- Not able to read printed receipts; Craig would like to have more digital receipts to be able to check charges.

- A lack of accessible transport from train stations to accommodation, particularly if the location is remote.

- Buffet breakfasts, and lack of support from staff to understand what is on offer or to be able to go back for more!

- Too many visual considerations when researching a holiday, such as distances on maps, photos of rooms, food, location, and where to get the best price.

Tools

- Trusted, sighted friends or family to help make decisions and navigate environments.

- Google searches to research different holidays.

- Craig's screen reader on his phone that enables him to read information (so long as it is set out in an accessible format!)

I'm Craig

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Highlights

- Craig loves to see businesses going the extra mile to provide facilities for assistance dogs, and information relating to assistance dogs in general on websites previsit.

- He really benefits from guided tours of accommodation, so he knows where plug sockets are and how to use the coffee machine, for example.

- Staff that are ready and willing to guide Craig and provide proactive assistance.

- The ability to inspect the bill at a restaurant and pay digitally. Craig would rather have an inclusive platform like this than a Braille menu.

- Audio announcements for information and emergencies.