



ACCENTUATE

# Involving Disabled People in Access Audits – A Destination Zones Toolkit For Best Practice

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**Destination Zones is part of Accentuate, a transformational programme of 15 projects, inspired by the Paralympic Movement, which seeks to change perceptions and offer opportunities to showcase the talents of deaf and disabled people. Accentuate is funded by Legacy Trust UK, creating a lasting legacy from the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games across the UK, SEEDA and the regional cultural agencies. Screen South is the home of Accentuate.**

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# Introduction

**This toolkit aims to be a practical guide to the best practice for involving disabled people in the access auditing process. This document will be useful for Local Authorities and large tourism organisations who are seeking to improve access for disabled people in their region. However, it should also prove useful for anyone looking to involve disabled people in the participatory process. It has been commissioned by Accentuate and Tourism South East as part of their Destination Zones project.**

Destination Zones is a project that aims to harness the spirit of the Paralympic Movement. It hopes that spirit will manifest itself through very real changes around access in the South East.

The spirit of the Paralympics aims to increase everyone's ability to contribute to positive social change and the strengthening of society. This spirit is about the positive promotion of opportunity, participation and equality, and making changes so that these things continue to be available to future generations. These are the very things that Accentuate and TSE are trying to achieve with Destination Zones.

Through the Destination Zones project, Tourism South East has been able to offer access audits and "Welcome All" training to destinations wanting to know how they could improve the services and facilities they offer to their disabled visitors. This toolkit is based on the report 'Involving Disabled People' which was commissioned to evaluate the involvement of disabled people in these access audits.



# How to Use This Toolkit

This toolkit will outline the economic and social advantages of involving disabled people in access improvements. It centres on a checklist that aims to guide you to best practice in your delivery of the engagement process. There is a list of useful resources and links housed in the appendix, which should supplement the tools presented here. By using these resources you will gain an understanding of the benefits of involving disabled people, as well as the practical considerations and ideas that can make it a meaningful experience for all involved. The voices of participants and auditors (from the Destination Zones project) have been used to illustrate this document. The main body is set out as follows:

## Part One

### **Why Bother Improving Access At All? The Economic Case.**

An overview of the potential market opportunities that are to be gained by improving access.

## Part Two

### **Why Is It Important To Involve Disabled People In Participation?**

The benefits of involving disabled people in consultation and decision-making, specifically around access improvements.

## Part Three

### **How Do I Involve Disabled People In Meaningful Participation?**

A checklist of eight steps to be used before, during and after the engagement process. This section will expand on the purpose of each step, giving examples of good practice and pinpointing where challenges can arise.

## Part Four

### **How Can I Make Change A Reality?**

Practical suggestions (arising from 'Involving Disabled People') for implementing the audit recommendations: how this can be encouraged, and what role disabled people might play in helping to create a meaningful legacy from the project.

### **Close and Acknowledgements**

### **Appendix** Resource List

# Part One

## Why Bother Improving Access At All? The Economic Case.

### Market Size And Growth:

An estimated £80 billion is spent on goods and services by disabled consumers each year in the UK<sup>1</sup>. There are over 10 million disabled consumers nationwide<sup>2</sup> and with an ageing population, this is only set to increase. Currently, 33% of 50-65 year olds and 42% of people over the age of 65, are disabled<sup>3</sup>. This means that businesses that fail to improve access will risk losing both existing and potential customers. By contrast, those who have already been more responsive have seen a, “rapidly expanding customer base, increases in sales and profitability and gained a substantial ‘foothold’ in their market, as well as a distinct advantage to their competitors”<sup>4</sup>.

### Disabled Customers And Their Buying Patterns:

As well as the economic advantages of reaching a larger market, businesses also need to be aware of the potential loss of business they face by not being accessible. The experiences of disabled consumers impact hugely on the purchasing decisions of other, non-disabled consumers. In fact, 58% of disabled people state that how a business treats them affects the choices their families and friends make<sup>5</sup>. Disabled people are often in the company of carers/personal assistants, family, and friends, and the choice of venue for the whole group will often be dependent

on good access. Not only will the more accessible venues win the groups’ custom but they are also more likely to get return custom from those consumers individually as well. In terms of PR it makes sense to show a positive attitude towards disability. According to the EFD website, 70% of all consumers would feel more positive about a company if its product and marketing information showed greater focus on disabled people’s needs<sup>6</sup>.

Many SME’s may not even be aware that they are losing existing customers. Over 1/3 of disabled customers do not complain about the poor service they receive<sup>7</sup>. Similarly many businesses may not be aware they are missing out on business even if they are already set up to meet customers’ needs.

“They tended to use the larger organisations because they were much more likely to be, at least in part, more accessible. Many of the small to medium enterprises had the potential for, or were already offering accessible services but few recognised or promoted them confidently and as a consequence, were significantly underused by disabled people.” (MaceMark access consultants).

Disabled consumers tend to research and plan before travelling, booking or visiting venues, precisely because they are dependent on good access being available. The

nationwide disabled access register, [www.directenquiries.com](http://www.directenquiries.com), receives 250,000<sup>8</sup> hits per week from people looking for accessible local businesses.

### Understanding Access Needs:

There are not always visual indicators that a person is disabled. Disabled people are not a homogenous group and wheelchair-users account for less than 8% of the total<sup>9</sup>. There are a whole range of impairments that disabled people may have which could affect them physically, emotionally and cognitively. Good access is as much about inclusive service delivery and customer care as it is about the built environment. It is not all about lifts and ramps and improving access isn't always an expensive undertaking. Sometimes small changes can have a huge impact on a customer's experience. Improving access for those who are most in need will also mean that you improve things for all your customers, young, old, those with pushchairs,



wheelchairs, arms full of shopping, support dogs, learning difficulties, fatigue, temporary conditions etc and as a consequence of this improved access, there will be more tourist traffic. Ultimately this will bring with it increased revenue and benefits to the local area and to those holding the purse strings; it's a win/win situation.

### Examples Of Success!

1 in 5 customers are likely to be disabled, but many businesses are yet to capitalise on this sector of the market. These examples illustrate exactly how advantageous changes around access can be for businesses<sup>10</sup>:

The Hytte is a provider of self-catering accommodation. After incorporating accessibility at the design and planning stage the benefits received include:

- Occupancy levels at 97% compared to average for the county of 55%
- 70% of customers are families and groups that include a disabled person
- Increasing proportion of elderly customers
- High proportion of repeat business
- Differentiator from other providers in the region

Petasfield Cottages, is an accommodation provider. Changes include 2 cottages for wheelchair users, website for partially sighted, hearing loop, walking frame, shopping delivery service. Benefits include:

- Within 16 months demand outstrips supply
- Revenue growth increase in the number of disabled customers
- Expansion plans brought forward

# Part Two

## Why Is It Important To Involve Disabled People In Participation?

There is still so much scope for improvement. It is a long journey, but this can only be of benefit to everyone.

It makes good business sense for all organisations to make their service reflective of consumer need and want. Not only does it bring customer satisfaction, but it encourages return visits and in turn, increased revenue. Involving people in the participatory process makes sense and for Councils it is a legislative obligation.

For a long time, disabled people have not had their voices heard or sought. They have had things done for them or to them, or done in their best interests. Rather than being asked what they think, or being allowed the opportunity to contribute, they have been disempowered. Exclusion, isolation, poverty and lack of opportunity are very real factors in the lives of many disabled people. It does not have to be this way. These debilitating factors do not come as part of a medical diagnosis or 'condition'; they are a consequence of poor design and lack of insight rather than a consequence of having an impairment.

Involving disabled people in a consultative or participatory process demonstrates a



commitment to and valuing of, the disabled visitor/customer/user. The more that this process becomes 'the norm', the more accessible and inclusive our society will become. It is a first step in a cultural shift towards equality.

“... through the Disability Equality Duties and equalities reviews within the public sector, disability is no longer the forgotten agenda. The challenge now is to imbed this into the private sector partners and tourism service providers in general. Much has been achieved in recent years and using the experiences of disabled people is by far the best way to determine what will give most improvement up to and beyond 2012.” (MaceMark)

## Personal Experience

Gaining first-hand, 'ground-level' experience and opinion is useful in any arena, but within the field of access, it is essential for realising effective change. The reality is that despite requirements under the DDA, there are still

very few fully accessible places. By involving disabled people in the auditing process you can gain a more accurate picture of existing access, which strategists, providers and service deliverers can then develop and expand upon.

By consulting with disabled people, organisations are able to show a real commitment towards putting disabled people at the centre of their projects and also gain huge insight and knowledge that they may not otherwise have had:

“Non-disabled people don’t understand. They are more caught up in their own concerns and worries. We all do that... I think if you stop someone and explain, they can understand. I don’t think it’s that they don’t care, I think they just haven’t thought through how it affects someone else.”

“If you’re not disabled you don’t know what to look for. It seems obvious to you because you are disabled and deal with it every day, but I guess it isn’t as obvious to everyone else.”

Without direct personal experience, it is impossible to know the ins and outs of anyone else’s lives and how different things affect them. An auditor may have a lot of experience of being out and about with a wheelchair user, which will give him new insights, but he will not have had the same experiences, or experienced things in the same way, as the wheelchair user himself. It is very difficult to know what things get in the way and what things work well. This means that services, facilities and environments are designed, delivered and built without taking on board all the implications and realities, which then present themselves as negative experiences for customers:

“They mention they have disabled parking, but when you arrive you find it’s all gravel and you can’t push a wheelchair through it.”

“They put in a handrail but don’t realise that if you use a walking stick you use the same hand whether you are going one way or the other. Only having a rail on one side means you can only hold on to it in one direction. Its things like this that you don’t realise unless you are in that position yourself.”

This demonstrates quite well that whilst there are improvements being made, not all of those improvements are necessarily good enough or catering for everybody’s needs.

### Local Insight

As well as gaining insight into the more universal access issues, involving disabled people will bring more site-specific knowledge to the auditing process. By involving disabled people who live in the local area, you will be able to amass details relating directly to particular service providers and venues and to the geographic landscape:

“Local people know the area well; they have first hand experience of living in it and of what their own access requirements are in different places. The more you consult, the more information you get. They need to plug into that local knowledge. We were able to complement everything Val was doing.”

By involving disabled people from the outset and incorporating their views, services and destinations will be better able to tailor their delivery and their environments to ensure customers’ needs are catered for effectively. Not only does this bring customer satisfaction but it can also maximise revenue.

# Part Three

This Checklist highlights the main considerations when involving disabled people in improving access. These eight steps are based on recommendations from the report 'Involving Disabled People', an evaluation of involving Deaf and Disabled people in the Destination Zones access audits. They are illustrated with quotes from the auditors and participants and experiential evidence from that project.



**Step 1. Are you sitting comfortably?**

**Step 2. Have you involved disabled people right at the start?**

**Step 3. Have you recruited a diverse group of participants to consult?**

**Step 4. Show your appreciation.**

**Step 5. How will you know if this engagement was successful?**

**Step 6. Have you been clear about roles and expectations?**

**Step 7. Creating a supported and positive experience.**

**Step 8. Happy endings.**

## STEP ONE

### Are You Sitting Comfortably?

“She was very good. She had an understanding of things even down to knowing how to face someone who is hearing impaired so that they can lip read”; “She was empathetic but didn’t talk down to anyone”; “She made people feel she was grateful for their input and valued what they were saying”; “He was very good actually and he listened. He took notes when we talked, treated us equally”.

By coming across in a sensitive and respectful way you can help participants to feel they are being treated equally and that their input is valued.

However, the idea of disability can make many people feel uncomfortable. People often fear saying the ‘wrong thing’ or not knowing how to cater for someone’s needs. If this is something that worries you, you might like to consider participating in a disability equality workshop. It is beneficial to everyone in terms of understanding diversity and looking at how to remove/overcome barriers. It may also help you to feel more confident and see new ways to approach this engagement so that both you and the participants get the most out of it.

“We were impressed with them. Most companies we deal with really need to learn about disability before they come!”

Understanding the background and implications of inequality is the first step to identifying ways to improve accessibility. In tourism, poor access can mean the difference between a good day out, a bad day out, or even no day out at all and the wider societal implications are far bigger. Poor access can result in social exclusion, lack of opportunity

and choice, isolation and poverty. There are lots of different workshops available so if you do decide to enrol in some training, it is worth knowing what to look for. There is a risk that if training focuses on improving access or awareness, without really addressing the equality issues behind it, trainees will only pay lip service to improving access, rather than having any real conviction in making it a reality. By contrast, good Disability Equality training really allows you to question and explore your own understanding and assumptions. It encourages you to look for ways to incorporate a supportive and pro-active outlook to all areas of life. It is always delivered by a disabled person and is about gaining a real understanding and empathy and making your own paradigm shift. Only then is it about how you best apply that approach to your work.

## STEP TWO

### Have You Involved Disabled People Right At The Start?

“Anyone, not just people with disabilities, but anyone giving their time to input to audits or forums etc deserves to be involved from beginning to end.”

As soon as you have an idea or an aim, involve your target group of disabled people. You will get better value for money and use your time more effectively if you allow them to help you devise your strategy. It is key that you do not go in with this part already decided. It is better to keep the overall aim in mind and let the collaboration shape how this is best achieved. For example, in Destination Zones, the aim was to make the South East more welcoming for disabled people by improving access. The next stage

should then be for the group to collaborate with the commissioners and other agencies to see how this could best be achieved. If the group decides the next stage is to carry out access audits then best practice would involve allowing your participants to also help you select your auditors. Ideally the auditors would be disabled themselves.

One of the Destination Zones participants recounted a former positive experience:

“... we were involved in the consultation process from beginning to the very end. Initially we were invited to attend a well organised initial brain storming type meeting - we then received a draft copy of the proposals for improvements which were based on all the meetings that had been held and we were invited to submit further feedback. Then we were sent the final proposals and then when the project was finished all those involved in the consultation process were invited to a special pre-opening day when we were shown how much of our input had been realised. That is worthwhile - I felt listened to, valued and had a great sense of achievement.”

This sort of comprehensive involvement brings benefits to all involved and avoids participants feeling the task is “un fait accompli”.

“...the plans had already been made. We could have been involved at the beginning”.

By involving participants at the beginning you will build a relationship of trust and balance between all those involved and allow a strategy to develop that is reflective of the market need and want. This can only be good value.

### STEP THREE

#### Have You Recruited A Diverse Group Of Participants To Consult With?

“On the one hand I had an auditor telling me they had found it very difficult to find any disabled people to consult with and on the other hand some of the disabled people I spoke to told me that, as disabled people, they are rarely asked for their views. So it seems that we have people wanting to hear what disabled people have to say and disabled people wanting to be heard, but somehow the two groups are not coming together properly.”  
(Involving Disabled People)

#### Bringing People Together

One way of involving disabled people in your project is to invite members of the public to come together as a steering group. The advantage of doing this is that you can target and select a diverse group of disabled people and benefit from their pool of knowledge, experience and insight as your project progresses.

This could be done by:

- Putting articles in the local press.
- Advertising on County, District and Town Council websites.
- Placing an article in Council publications going out to residents.
- Posters on notice boards in key centres.
- Contacting local or nationwide groups through web research.
- Approaching individuals suggested by other groups and organisations.

Advertising your project also requires sensitive, audience-appropriate design and input from disabled people would be beneficial

at the design stage. All printed and electronic information should be tailored to the target audience, so consideration should be given to:

- font size (min 12pt)
- font style (Arial)
- use of pictures/symbols (Makaton, Widgit)
- layout (uncluttered)
- colours (contrasting, ie white text on black background)
- the words you use (simple language no acronyms)

Building a diverse group will give you more rounded feedback so it would be wise to engage representatives from all the 'diversity strands'. Whilst it may not always be possible to know if you have achieved this, it is important to try. One group who are often not asked for their view is disabled children and young people and as they are likely to visit tourist attractions for their own interest as well as when travelling with their families, schools or clubs, it makes sense to find ways to involve them. It would also be best practice to make sure that as many impairment types as possible are represented within the group.

“The larger (access) groups generally had a mobility bias so we went back looking for learning difficulties groups and used our current contacts with sensory specific groups. We also looked at mental health groups.”

### Using Existing Groups

One option for engaging disabled people in your project is to use Access Groups. These are groups of disabled people who campaign to improve access in their own local area. They are usually independent, self-funded, not-for-profit, self-managed organisations. Whilst their members tend to be primarily disabled, they often include carers and other interested parties within their meetings. Contact with these groups may be made via your Councils' Access Officers and Tourism Officers. In some areas links between the Access Groups and the Local Authorities are quite strong, with some feeding directly into decision making at quite a high level. However, in other towns the groups are non-existent and the Access Officer posts under threat. Despite this, even where Access Groups are unavailable there are plenty of other groups of disabled people who are keen to give their views, so do consider a variety of avenues.



“There are lots of pots of voices around... I guess it depends how hard you want to look”

### On Location

As well as creating new groups and engaging with existing ones, auditors may find it beneficial to approach individuals on site. Asking people for their views whilst on location can have all sorts of benefits, including those arising from immediate recall, recent experience and visual prompts. You may also be able to get the views of people who may not otherwise have come forward as participants. A deliberate decision to coincide audit visits with the summer months and times when locations are likely to be busy, can lead to higher incidents of engagement.

There is no harm in asking a wide selection of people how they found access at the venue. Approaching people even if they do not visibly appear to be disabled, works well in a broad sense, because even non-disabled people can have issues around access, particularly families with small children, and those who do not speak English. Also, many people have ‘hidden disabilities’ that do not show themselves so visually and their day may be just as affected by the attitudes and language of staff with no equalities training, poor layout of facilities, or inaccessible information as, for example, a wheelchair user might be.

### STEP FOUR Show Your Appreciation

It is good practice for some form of remuneration to be offered to participants in order to show appreciation and that you value their input.

Despite their passion, and enthusiasm to participate, there is a risk that the willingness

of disabled people (and perhaps, their need to make changes) is being taken for granted.

“Doing this is like doing something to benefit others, other disabled people. You want to make it easier for others even when you’re no longer there. You don’t want them to have to put up with all of these things.”

When people are sharing their views, and a little bit of themselves, it is important that the value of it is acknowledged in real terms:

“With regards to payment/vouchers- they weren’t offered but I do think it is welcome and it shows you value them taking part.”

The very fact that Access Groups exist means there is a need for change. Those who are most motivated and able do so, do what they can to try and make the changes a reality. However, because they are campaigning for change, they are limited to what funding they can access. All the groups are faced with funding issues.

“We weren’t offered any reward and recognition or to have our expenses covered, we never are. We run our group on £25 a month. Being paid for consulting would make a big difference to our group.”

Remuneration for expenses, and reward and recognition payments not only show good will, but can make a big difference to the financial viability of people to participate. Reimbursements you might like to consider making are:

- travel costs
- childcare expenses
- meal/refreshment costs
- costs arising from any support needs

Rules for benefit claimants can cause difficulties in terms of paying participants, so do be aware of this and make sure that participants are too. You may need to make enquiries with DWP before going ahead. Child labour laws can also make it difficult to pay children but you could consider offering thank you presents or gift vouchers as an alternative. If you do go down this route, you will need to think about who will be responsible for funding it. If it is to be the responsibility of the auditors, they will need to factor it in when submitting their bid for work. Therefore, the commissioner should be explicit about this responsibility within their brief and be clear that they expect to see the cost for this reflected in the bid submission.

## STEP FIVE

### How Will You Know If This Engagement Was Successful?

Best practice would involve everyone who is participating in the project to decide how evaluation will happen and how it will be measured. Areas to consider include:

- Who will be involved in carrying out the evaluation?
- What are the most appropriate ways of organising it?
- How will people contribute to it?
- How will the outcome be shared?
- How will the results be used?

Consideration needs to be given to the timing of the evaluation process. By integrating it into the engagement process itself, you will gain more reactive feedback, and it can also help to direct how the project progresses. However, you may prefer participants to have time to reflect before feeding back. By evaluating at the end of the project you will still maintain



good recall of events and perhaps have a more considered assessment.

When considering what to evaluate, it would be good practice to look at how meaningful and accessible the engagement process was for the disabled participants, as well as evaluating the auditing process and any resulting changes to access. By involving disabled people in designing the evaluation process you will ensure that it is done in an inclusive and accessible way. There are many ways to give your view; questionnaires and interviews are not the only ways. You may like to be more creative and use comment boxes, post-it boards, traffic light cards, or games. Participation websites and books are brimming with ideas that can help you make it an engaging, and accessible process.

## STEP SIX Have You Been Clear About Roles And Expectations?

The importance of involving disabled people in the auditing process needs to be explicit in the auditors brief. Outlining your expectations of this and giving examples might prove useful. For example:

- How many people should be involved?
- Are there any particular groups you are interested in hearing from?
- What links and resources are already available?
- Who will be funding any costs arising from access requirements?
- Who will be funding any remuneration?

It may also help participants to feel more comfortable and prepared if you provide them with a brief. Try to give a realistic idea of what you hope to achieve, thereby avoiding participants becoming sceptical and frustrated. Unknown financial limits or political situations may skew their expectations of what can actually be achieved.

**“There is a difference between what you would like to achieve and what you actually get.”**

Briefs for participants could include:

- What their role will involve
- The aims and limits of the engagement
- The aims and limits of the overall project
- What participants can expect from commissioner and/or auditors
- What support might be available
- The expected length and nature of involvement
- What you will do with the information they give you



- How and when you will give feedback
- How you will evidence participant-influenced outcomes.

## STEP SEVEN Creating A Supported And Positive Experience

### The Right Person For The Job

Best practice would involve consultation being undertaken by participation workers who are reflective of the participants' own needs and backgrounds. This helps to break down barriers and allow participants to feel they are talking to someone who may be able to relate to them in similar ways. In situations where auditors are being asked to take on this additional role, they will need to be flexible and inclusive in their approach.

### Being flexible and offering choice

Disabled people often have better times of the day than others. Some have good days and bad days as well as all the other commitments that everyone else juggles, so do allow for this when making arrangements:

**“Keith gave us the choice of where to meet, what date, and what time. So, it suited us”.**

When you take into account some of the issues that might face a disabled person and affect their general well-being (fatigue, pain, transport costs) as well as their willingness and ability to participate, then it is essential that care is taken to make things as easy as possible. It would be far better to suggest ‘I am happy to come to you, when and where would be best?’

### Creating A Safe Environment

Creating a ‘safe space’ where participants’ needs are met will allow them to feel comfortable and tell you their views. Making sure the following are audience-appropriate might help with this:

- working environment
- delivery style and format
- ‘get out clause’ (ways to say no, ways to leave)
- content of information
- opportunity and methods to ‘have a say’

If you are able to join an Access Groups at one of their meetings you may already have an existing safe space to work in. Group members will already be familiar with each other, and a familiar environment will help people to feel more at ease. It may also prove more convenient and less disruptive for all involved.

“We all meet anyway and are all used to each other and like to have a good natter... We have some good dynamics in the group... so it works well. The people in our group all have physical impairments and issues around mobility so we were able to give our views without having to listen to people give their views about something that didn’t relate to our own experience.”

Where there is more of a mix of impairment types, the auditors would do well to prepare



their participants in advance by meeting with the Chair, identifying what the focus of the meeting will be, and briefing members before they meet. This approach allows participants to prepare in advance; some people may need more time and support to process their views and to communicate them. It also allows people to give their view even if they are not able to come on the day:

“Members have a range of impairments from mobility, to sensory, to learning. Everyone there had chosen to come and knew what they were there to discuss.”

“Some people prepared written statements of what they wanted to say and brought it with them.”

Group sessions can work well but are not appropriate for everyone. Some people’s safe spaces might require having no one else in them at all! By offering additional one to one sessions you will enable the consultation to be more inclusive and flexible, particularly around communication methods or needs arising from impairments.



### Allowing People To Give Their Views In A Variety Of Ways

Using questionnaires is a traditional route to consultation. Involving disabled people in the development of the questionnaire, will ensure that its design will work well for people with learning difficulties, for children and young people, and people with visual impairment. Good initial communication between all parties will also allow the information gained to be recorded in the most effective way for analysis. By offering a range of ways for people to express their views, consultations can be tailored to need. A choice of formats through which to communicate is important. You can make it as creative as you like including:

- Facebook
- websites
- email
- text
- games and activities
- use of pictures, and photos
- use of written, oral, and face to face communication.

Another effective way to involve disabled people is to facilitate them in the auditing process itself, bringing participants out on site to directly help with the assessments. As well as allowing the participant to feel they

have contributed in a very tangible way, it can also provide insights that a person without that impairment may have otherwise missed. This method really shows commitment and flexibility in approach, and the real value the auditors place on user-involvement.

### Allowing Enough Time

One of the biggest barriers to good consultation is time. Ideally there should be time allowed to build a rapport and relationship of trust with the participant. Be aware that this may be the first time your participants have ever been asked for their view on what might have been quite frustrating or isolating experiences. You may need to allow extra time for the processing of this.

*“We all had a chance to give our views and she was very patient when we went off on a tangent. She let us talk.”*

In addition, time is needed for the participants to be able to relax and to talk around the subject. A skilled participation worker will strike a careful balance between asking open and closed questions, and allow room for the participant to lead, whilst being aware of leading or directing in their own questioning. Time to allow for this kind of approach is often underestimated:

*“There needs to be more time allowed for involving disabled people.”*

### STEP EIGHT Happy Endings

Happy endings are so important. They give closure and finality to a piece of work. When disabled people are invited to share what are often not very pleasant experiences around

inclusion and access, they are sharing times where they may have felt very vulnerable and disempowered. At best they will be able to share with you examples of good access, and they will be passionate about seeing more of it and frustrated that they often don't. It can be an emotional rollercoaster for the participant and it is important that they are made to feel as comfortable as possible during the ride. When the ride is over they need to be on 'safe ground' and feel that the ride was worth it. By evidencing the changes that have come as a result of their involvement, you will allow the participants to see the value of their contribution.

“...otherwise we can't tell if they have actually listened or acted on it and you feel you need to bang your head against a brick wall.”

### Feeding Back

The delivering of feedback is so essential to how the participant subsequently feels about the whole process. In addition to being courteous, giving feedback is also the unveiling of the final product. Participants will be keen to know the results of their involvement and what changes have manifested. Unfortunately poor or no feedback is one aspect of consultation that participants feel regularly let down by. You can avoid this in your engagement by following these tips for good practice:

- Offer to provide feedback
- Explain what form feedback might come in (email, letter, report, phone call, posted on website, presentation, long and detailed, short and brief)
- Give a timescale for delivery of feedback, and stick to it!
- Offer feedback in alternative formats depending on participant preference and need

### Leaving The Door Open

There are benefits for all parties involved in an engagement such as this. Positive, sustainable relationships created between auditors and participants can bring mutual benefits. Disabled participants will not only benefit from the resulting improvements to access in their area, but also from the experience of participation itself. For auditors and commissioners it is an opportunity to build bridges for future engagements.

“She involved us in assisting her and making it as good as possible. It was a two way thing.”

“We've had follow up meetings with Val since this project about wider issues within the county. She wants to keep in touch with us so we can help inform her work.”



# Part Four

## How Can I Make Change A Reality?

One of the main challenges facing Councils and Tourism Organisations who are trying to improve access, is encouraging their service providers and SME's to act on the audit recommendations. Fear of cost, not seeing the potential benefits, and a lack of external encouragement can all play a part in the reports being shelved and gathering dust. If access is to be improved, and the audits are to have been worthwhile and cost effective, changes do need to be made.



Allowing people to feel they are a part of a bigger movement for change may help them to feel less isolated in this, and more connected to the project. Inclusion and frequent communication will allow them to identify their own role within this cultural shift and may encourage them to take some responsibility towards facilitating it.

Here follows some practical suggestions arising from the 'Involving Disabled People' report as to how this might be achieved.

## Encouraging Change

The report recommends that venues and services be encouraged to understand the big impact that making small changes can have for their customers. Sometimes venues and attractions are already half-way there. In some cases just a bit of tweaking is needed to make the difference between no access and good access. These are relatively simple and inexpensive things that can make a huge difference:

- Cheap solutions - Not all improvements to access cost lots of money, and they don't necessarily involve permanent structural change. For example a portable ramp can be quite inexpensive and can be used as and when it is needed.
- Use what you've got - Where equipment has been installed, it is important to make sure it

is actually being used. For example, auditors noted that some train stations have all the kit to make them accessible but either don't have them in operation or don't have the accessible till open at all.

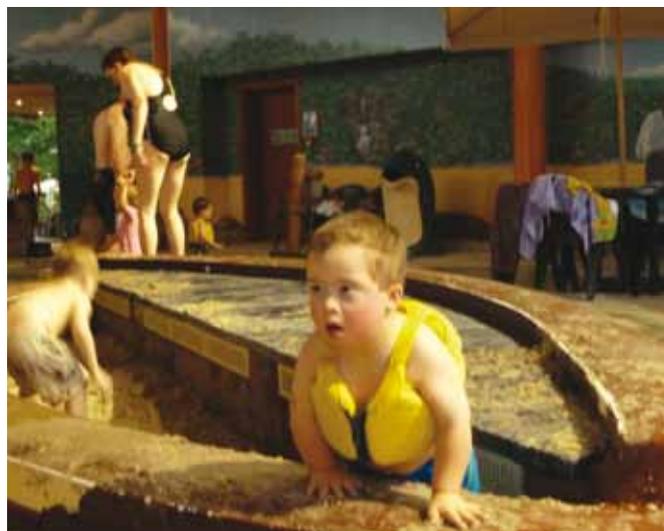
- Improve usability – For example, websites may have good information on them but no clear way of finding it.
- Provide accurate and detailed information - This can make it easier for an individual to judge whether or not they would be able to access a venue. For example, knowing the height of a step, or the surface of a path.

### There Are Also Steps That Local Authorities Could Put Into Practice:

- Plan, and collaborate with other agencies and departments to devise joined up strategies for improving access.
- Allocate a body to issue reminders within Local Authorities on equalities duties and responsibilities.
- Work with contracted services to improve accessibility of their service or sever their contracts and work with more accessible providers.
- Establish on-going evaluation. For example with Access Groups or by setting up a Disabled Person's Participation Group.
- Make feedback forms about access, available in visitor venues.
- Find a local disabled 'champion' who can promote and challenge.
- Promote existing good access – For example, through creation of a guide marking out flagships of good access.

### Pat Yourselves On The Back!

Where access is already good, it deserves recognition, not least because disabled people need to know it's there! Consider ways to endorse, promote and maximise publicity



for the venues who do act on the audit recommendations. It may encourage others to follow suit. Suggestions include:

- Devising a medal award scheme. For example (and with a paralympic theme), this could be based on achieving full accessibility, as outlined by the audits on each place. A venue being 100% compliant with its audit recommendations could be awarded a gold medal, 85% compliance could win silver, and 75% bronze.
- Recruitment of paralympic athletes or disabled artists with public profiles to lend their names and cut ribbons at celebratory openings of access works. For example, "Join us for a trip down the river on the now wheelchair accessible boat, the 'Helene Raynsford.'"
- Use your existing channels of communication. For example, Local Authority E-zines, magazines, and websites could run features looking at those who have, and those who intend to make improvements.
- Engage local Access Groups you have been working with to channel stories through the local press and television channels.
- Use quotes from local people and visitors about their (hopefully good), experiences of access, when advertising a venue/service.

### Close And Acknowledgements

Participation that is delivered effectively can make an enormous difference to how the views of disabled people are incorporated into the shaping of our society. It can help to make our environment and service delivery more reflective of and responsive to need, and more accessible for everybody. The benefits are countless and will be reaped by consumers, workers, businesses and service providers. This should have a ripple effect throughout our communities and really help to start making that cultural shift towards equality, a reality.

This toolkit should provide a framework on which to build effective and meaningful engagement with disabled people. The resource list will also point you to links and publications where you can further broaden your knowledge base and see example of good practice. As with any craftsman, good tools, instruction, and preparation are essential. Having them is one thing, and using them is another. It is your responsibility now to pick up those tools, to make sense of those instructions, and to use your knowledge and skills to start building!

I would like to thank all those who gave me their time and shared their views with me: auditors MaceMark, and Tourism For All and most importantly the representatives of the all the Access Groups, whose valuable insights have made this toolkit possible.



## Appendix

### Resource List

[www.accentuate-se.org](http://www.accentuate-se.org)

Website outlining all 15 of Accentuate's projects around disability, sport, art, tourism, business and culture.

[www.tourismsoutheast.com](http://www.tourismsoutheast.com)

[www.visitsoutheastengland.com](http://www.visitsoutheastengland.com)

Websites for information about/by Tourism South East

<http://www.openbritain.net>

Online directory of accessible accommodation and travel – a joint project between RADAR and Tourism For All UK.

<http://www.visitengland.org/busdev/bussupport/access/index.aspx>

Website which includes information on how to make tourism accessible: business case, customer service, information, and facilities.

<http://www.involve.org.uk>

Website with resources for public consultation

<http://www.eaconsultancy.co.uk>

An good example of a Disabled Persons' Participation Group running in East Sussex which is regularly tapped into by organisations and Local Authorities in the region.

<http://odi.dwp.gov.uk/involving-disabled-people>

Website for Office of Disability Issues. Information on legal duties and resources on engaging with disabled groups.

<http://www.bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/business-sectors/docs/0-9/10-1126-2012-legacy-for-disabled-people-case-for-the-disabled-customer>

Report by Atkins: 2012 Legacy For Disabled People: Inclusive And Accessible Business, August 2010

<http://www.dotheduty.org>

Introductory information written for Local Authorities outlining their obligations under the Equalities Act – includes Codes of Practice, How to involve disabled people, and Impact Assessments.

[www.equalityhumanrights.com](http://www.equalityhumanrights.com)

Website for the Equality and Human Rights Commission which replaced the former Disability Rights Commission. Includes further information on legal obligations.

[www.participationworks.org.uk/resources](http://www.participationworks.org.uk/resources)

Website with good resources and information about engaging with children and young people

<https://czone.eastsussex.gov.uk/supporting-children/youth/youthparticipation/toolkits/Documents/Czone%20Essentials%20Participation.pdf>

This is a useful resource for involving children and young people and finding out their views.

<http://www.triangle.org.uk>

Website for an organisation very experienced in running consultations with disabled children and young people. They also run their own consultative groups of children and young people.

<http://bucksmind.org.uk>

Buckinghamshire Mind promotes good mental health and runs advocacy services. They have their own consultative group.

<http://www.ableize.com>

A useful website for all things disability including a nationwide directory of disabled groups.

**'Left Out: Disabled People's Access to Goods and Services'**

Morris, Gwilym & Ford, James. 2000. Scope, London

**'Participatory Workshops: A Sourcebook of 21 Sets of Ideas and Activities'**

Chambers R, 2002, Earthscan Ltd.

**'Methods for Community Participation: A Complete Guide for Practitioners'**

Kumar S, 2003, ITDG Publishing

## Notes

- 1 DWP: Press Release, 3 December 2004
- 2 Atkins estimate based on the following figures: 10.6m disabled people for 2007/08 (ODI: Disability prevalence estimates, ODI website) and 61.4 million UK overall population as of mid-2008 (ONS: Population estimates. Statistical bulletin, August 2009); makes allowance for the figure of 10.6 million under-representing the total number of disabled people, Atkins: 2012 Legacy For Disabled People: Inclusive And Accessible Business, August 2010
- 3 Labour Force Survey, ONS, Autumn 2005 (as reported by Employers Forum for Disability (EFD))
- 4 Atkins: 2012 Legacy For Disabled People: Inclusive And Accessible Business, August 2010
- 5 EFD, RADAR: The Walk Away £, 2006
- 6 EFD, website [www.efd.org.uk](http://www.efd.org.uk)
- 7 EFD, RADAR: The Walk Away £, 2006
- 8 EFD, website
- 9 DRC: Media briefing on disability in the workplace, 2005
- 10 See note 4



