

VisitEngland 

**Marwell Wildlife:
'Changing Places' is
good for business!**



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Marwell Wildlife installed a Changing Places facility in a bid to provide world class facilities to all its visitors. The facility has opened up a new revenue stream through attracting additional and longer visits by disabled people.

Guest Operations Director, Simon Cox talks about the charity's approach to improving the quality of the visitor experience.

What is a Changing Places (CP) facility?

It is a toilet facility suitable for the needs of people with severe disabilities. They have extra features including adjustable changing benches and ceiling hoists plus enough room for at least two carers. I think by us providing this facility it eliminates the embarrassment factor for parents and staff.



Why did you decide to fit a CP facility?

We were getting quite a few guests with severe disabilities visiting us but only spending a few hours here as we didn't have the facilities they require. Our hilly site may present issues for disabled groups and the elderly. We looked at how we could be inviting to all these groups, which may not think of us as a place to visit.

Changing Places wasn't even on our radar. We were approached by the father of a son with Cerebral Palsy who loved coming here but found it difficult to use us and he suggested we put in a CP facility. He wanted to visit us more often with his son.

You can build the greatest exhibit in the world but if you come here and you can't use the toilet facility because it is not suitable, then that isn't world class.



“We need to be ‘World Class’ for everyone who comes through the front gate”

Is this part of a wider access improvement programme?

We are making a big effort to get all social groups into the park as we should be accessible to everybody. We were ostracising certain elements of the community.

The RNIB, who are having a conference here, are helping us develop our accessibility for people who are blind and partially sighted. Our old mobility scooters were not up to standard so we are trying to come up with something that is much more suitable for our hilly site. We want people to just be able to get on with what they want to do, not have to flag up their scooter has broken down.

How did you go about installing a CP facility?

Our toilets were old and needed upgrading anyway so we bolted the CP facility installation into this project. We knocked two old standard disabled toilets into one. The door is locked with a RADAR key, which is available at the front entrance and all cleaners carry them.

Our Project Manager worked with MENCAP who gave us all the information we required including lists of fitters and equipment suppliers. They recommended what equipment to install. There were some supply delays but they didn't impact on the opening time. It was about six months from start to finish.

“MENCAP were really helpful and the whole project went very smoothly”

QUOTE

How did you fund the project?

The project cost was around £25,000. Hampshire County Council provided 40% from their Aiming High pot and we put up 60% of the cost. We only pay a couple of hundred pounds a year to service the equipment.

How were staff involved?

It is covered in the induction for permanent staff and on a crib sheet for casual staff. From time to time we do 'Marwell Bingo' where staff have to familiarise themselves with different aspects of the park; the CP toilet facility is included on there.

How has Marwell Wildlife benefited?

Length of stay is the main difference. Ray and his family definitely stay longer now, nearly all day. We track admissions and we have seen an increase in people who buy disabled tickets since we opened the facility. For example, one annual member who has a carer now comes a lot more and by having the facilities we hope to convert more disabled people to annual members.

When people visit for only two hours they typically bring a flask and go home for lunch but we are now certainly getting more spend in the cafés from disabled people.

We do education for disabled children and it is very good to have the CP facility for them to use.


“In the past, a local school wouldn't bring a group of disabled kids to us as we didn't have the facilities; this year they bought 8 kids for the first time”

QUOTE


How do you promote the facility?

We did a press release and got coverage in the local press when we launched the facility. It is marked specifically on all our maps and described on our website. There has been a gradual increase in the number of people using the facility.

The MENCAP and Changing Places website pinpoints us, so we may also get passing traffic that stops off as a result of the facility.



“As one of the first attractions it is nice to be leading the way”



“We may install another CP facility as we are a big site; I really believe there is a tangible benefit”

What advice do you have for other visitor attractions?

It opens another revenue stream and offers an opportunity for people to enjoy your attraction.

Identifying the location is by far the most important thing; look at where people are most likely to use it. And if you can build it into a wider project, such as a revamp of all toilets, it will cost less.

95% of our visitors use the toilets after their car journey to us, but the walk to the CP toilet could take 20 minutes. We are about to redo our entrance so I am suggesting we put a CP facility there too, that would really give us the opportunity to offer great service. If I didn't get funding for a second it wouldn't stop me doing it.

“The Changing Places facility means that we can be out for longer than four hours and spend a whole day at the park”

Ray Daniel, who has a son with Cerebral Palsy

Visit
www.marwell.org.uk/zooloofirst.asp

For guidance on how to improve accessibility please visit
www.visitengland.org/access
www.changing-places.org/

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