



Making your Community Festival Inclusive

“We want to model inclusion and see the community working together to celebrate everyone’s gifts and talents. We hope to create a legacy of disability ministry.”
Rev. M. Kuhrt, Chair, Stoke Mandeville Live – a 2012 Paralympic Opening night Festival

1.0 Introduction

This document will help you run your community festival to be inclusive and accessible to disabled people. As a result you should also find that all groups of your community will benefit, such as older people, young children and families with pushchairs. The following sections will address the key considerations and equip you with greater awareness, knowledge and understanding to recruit a team with relevant skills; select a suitable venue; offer appropriate activities and assistance; and promote your event.

Contents:

- **Why should we include disabled people?** – section 2.0
- **What shared principles could guide our planning?** – section 3.0
- **What skills/experience do we need?** – section 4.0
- **What do we look for in choosing an accessible venue?** – section 5.0
- **What help is appropriate to offer disabled people?** – section 6.0
- **How do we promote our Festival to disabled people?** – section 7.0
- **What knowledge/training do we need to equip our helpers with?** – section 8.0
- **What activities are suitable for an inclusive Festival?** – section 9.0
- **What should we say, or not say, to a disabled person?** – section 10.0
- **What next? Further inclusive resources** – section 11.0

2.0 Why should we include disabled people?

“More than one billion people experience some form of disability” (*World Health Organisation, 2011*).

“People are disabled by society, not just by their bodies. These barriers can be overcome, if governments, nongovernmental organizations, professionals and people with disabilities and their families work together (*The WHO/World Bank World report on disability*).

The term ‘disabled people’ includes not only those using wheelchairs or mobility aids, but also hidden disabilities such as autism, sensory loss, learning or mental health difficulties – those who, sadly, are subject to discrimination and marginalisation, often on a daily basis.

Disabled people are more likely to live in poverty, be unemployed and experience physical violence at work. They are more likely to suffer abuse, hate-crime and discrimination and

less likely to have internet access or hold qualifications. 72% of UK families with disabled children experience poor mental health, anxiety, depression or breakdown.

As Christians, guided by the Bible, we believe that:

- We are all created in God's image and have equal worth and value (*Genesis 1:27*)
- Jesus calls us to love people that society overlooks and excludes (*Luke 14*)
- Everyone has different skills and experiences to contribute, and without disabled people and their gifts, the church is incomplete (*1 Corinthians 12*).

3.0 What shared principles could guide our planning?

It is helpful for the leadership and organising team to agree to certain principles that underpin what you hope to achieve, and how you will do it. The following set of principles could be a helpful start to guide you...

- **Assume nothing** – always ask questions directly to a disabled individual about how best they can be supported and included
- **Believe** a disabled individual is able to achieve something and then revise your expectations as you progress
- **Create** a can-do culture that seeks to positively overcome challenges
- **Disabled individuals** are contributors to church and community life, not just recipients
- **Enable** a disabled person to do something by adapting the environment, equipment etc **with** their involvement, rather than doing it *to* or *for* them

4.0 What skills/experience do we need?

Within our church communities many people work in professions who have regular contact with disabled people, such as those in education, charitable work, caring professions, or local authority departments. When recruiting your team ask teachers, social workers, nurses, Occupational Therapists etc for their skills, ideas and help in running the event. Additionally, many people will have family members or friends who are disabled, or indeed have personal experience of disability themselves, and so can give input based on their own life experiences.

People with specific skills, such as British Sign Language interpreters might need to be paid for, although you may find some have these skills if you ask around. Servant-hearted individuals who are sensitive to meeting the needs of others and have a flexible approach can also be valuable contributors to your event.

5.0 What do we look for in choosing an accessible venue?

No venue will perfectly meet everyone's needs, however, you should take into account the access needs of disabled visitors, and wherever possible, remove or change any potential

barriers, or find an alternative venue to host your event. The following checklist highlights important factors to consider in assessing the suitability of any chosen venue...

- **Approach to venue**

- Level access?
- Clear signage to venue?

- **Parking**

- Number of allocated spaces for disabled people/blue badge holders?
- Sufficient for capacity?
- Possibility to reserve spaces?
- Drop-off and pick-up available?
- Level route to entrance?
- Illuminated after dark?

- **Venue entry/departure**

- Clear route?
- Signposted?

- **Welcome/reception on the day**

- Welcome/meet-and-greet team on-hand? Trained in inclusive issues? Informed to answer potential questions about inclusivity during event? Creating a sense of acceptance of those with disabilities?
- Seating (some with arms) available and reserved for those who find standing difficult, if queuing?
- Low-level desk/table

- **Toilets**

- Number of accessible toilets? Easy-to-get-to location, not tucked away? Potential to increase number?

- **Signage**

- Clear directions (text and graphic) to zones/activities/facilities?

- **Communication**

- PA system clear and not too loud?
- Positioning of speakers?
- Good acoustics?
- Announcer - clear? Not overpowering? Straightforward, jargon-free language?
- Sign language interpreters with announcer? (minimum of 2 required)
- Provision of a working loop system
- Subtitles on screen to accompany any TV/video?
- Commentary/audio description for purely visual content?
- If asking everybody to stand in response to something, it is helpful to say "please stand if it is comfortable for you to do so" which acknowledges differences

- **Information**

- Programme/timetable available?
- Alternative formats offered e.g. large print, Braille, electronic, audio, easy read, pictorial
- Legacy – what is available next? Signpost to local church activities?

- **Volunteers/helpers**

- Clearly distinguishable? e.g. badges, colour-coordinated caps/t-shirts
- Trained in disability awareness?
- Disabled volunteers enabled to contribute?
- Buddy mentors/supporters with specialist disability knowledge available?

- **Event layout**

- Access to all areas?
- Sufficient space between zones/equipment for flow of people including wheelchairs?
- Suitability of surfaces, particularly for wheelchair users/mobility difficulties (e.g. rubber matting/boarding on grassy/gravel areas?)
- Positioning of zones? e.g. Chill-out zone in quietest place?
- Seats with arms available and reserved for those who find standing difficult?
- Catering provided for those with allergies/particular dietary requirements?

- **Lighting**

- Good, even, glare and flicker-free lighting to assist those with sight loss or autism?

- **Safety**

- Assess in advance how the event will effect people of different disabilities and plan ways to manage around any negative impact ?
- Plan the emergency procedures for those with mobility difficulties/sight loss/people with learning disabilities?
- Audible and visible fire alarm?
- First Aid cover?
- Access for ambulance, if required?
- Site Manager aware of disability issues?
- Location of nearest hospital?

6.0 What help is appropriate to offer disabled people?

It is important for the festival to provide the following in order to cater for different needs...

- Allocated parking and drop-off point for disabled people
- Step-free access to venue with hard-standing areas e.g. wooden boards or rubber matting for wheelchair users
- Individual chairs available (for those with mobility difficulties/ME etc)
- Loop system in operation
- Sign language interpreters available

- Accessible toilets
- Large print and Braille versions of any printed materials
- A 'quiet space' for families or people needing time out, in particular children with autism or those with hypersensitivities to sensory stimulation
- Appropriate activity areas e.g. multi-sensory, inclusive sports and chill-out zones
- Volunteers trained in sensitivity to disabled people's needs who have a welcoming and accepting ethos
- Subtitles on-screen for showing TV/Video coverage
- Inclusion Support Team comprising of disabled people and/or those with experience of disability to be available at event to assist volunteers and facilitate inclusion

7.0 How do we promote our Festival to disabled people?

It is important to carefully consider the promotional methods and channels of communication used when advertising your event because many disabled people find it difficult to access regular publicity due to the format, print size, location etc. In addition, disabled people have historically found events and activities inappropriate for their needs, and so it is important to intentionally convey the message that the festival seeks to be as inclusive as possible. The following suggestions may help in targeting disabled people...

- Promotional materials should be deliberate in the message about inclusivity (otherwise disabled people and families will not think it relevant to them)
- Publicity should incorporate positive photos/images of disabled people
- It is helpful if the recognised disability symbols (wheelchair symbol, sign language) feature on promotional materials
- Personal invitations could directly be made to disability groups, special schools, day centres, local authority contacts etc
- Publicity could be made available for distribution in different formats e.g. large print, electronic
- Many disabled people will appreciate discussing access requirements in advance, therefore, identifying a named person and/or contact number on publicity would be useful
- Promoting the event through local and national disability networks such as Talking Newspapers, Sign Language interpreter contacts, disability sports groups etc will encourage attendance by disabled people

8.0 What knowledge/training do we need to equip our helpers with?

Ideally the training should be facilitated by someone with personal and/or professional experience of disability. The following Biblical reflection, discussion prompts, practical scenarios and top tips should help give you a framework for the designated trainer to equip your team to think and act more inclusively.

- **Introduction**

Disabled people don't want to be seen as 'special', just the same as everyone else, with all our differences. The inclusion of disabled people in festivals, as well as church and community life, builds a fuller representation of the kingdom and if we take action to include disabled people, everyone benefits e.g. older people, parents with pushchairs, younger children etc. Including disabled people is like the Christian faith journey – we are always learning and will make mistakes, but if we don't try we won't grow. It's a matter of faith because we're not depending on our own resources but on God's strength.

- **A Biblical mandate for mission** (5 mins)

Read Luke chapter 14: 12 – 24

The message of Jesus in Luke 14 is of inclusivity. He advises not to ask friends to a dinner party, but to invite the marginalised members of society – those living in poverty, or with personal experience of disability: people who are forgotten and overlooked (14:12-14). Jesus expresses the heart of his Father through the parable of a house owner who throws a banquet and orders his servants to go out and bring in 'the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame' (14:21). God's kingdom isn't complete without disabled people at the table. It is in human brokenness that the brightness of the gospel of grace is seen in all its power.

- **Prompts for discussion** (10 mins)

'The only disability in life is the wrong attitude' – Scott Hamilton

- Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Why?

'My legs may not work properly, but my spirit is not disabled' – Iyiola Olafimiyan

- What does this convey about our human identity?
- How do the above quotes and questions help us to better relate to disabled people and each other?

- **Practical scenarios** (10 mins)

Read out the following exercises to people...

- *(Ideally someone with sight loss could lead this scenario or interpret this activity afterwards)* "I would like you now, just for 2 minutes, to close your eyes and imagine that you have lost your sight...I don't want to scare you and we can't replicate what it's actually like with sight loss, but... it's helpful in giving us a **different perspective**. How you are feeling now? What are you thinking? What do you want to do about it? Are you perhaps thinking you're the only one closing their eyes? Are you thinking you might miss something? *(PAUSE)* Think how you got here today? (drive, walk, bike?) *(PAUSE)* and how will you get back home today? *(PAUSE)* What will happen when you want to eat? (Through the Roof has a blind member of staff – she cooks for herself, so it's achievable, but how would *you* do it? *(PAUSE)* How would you read your Bible or the newspaper, or a story to your children? *(PAUSE)* How would you get to church, or work, or get round the shops? *(PAUSE)*

How would you send a text...pay your bills,...or put out the rubbish bins? (PAUSE)
What help might you now need? (PAUSE)
What would you need to do differently? (PAUSE) and what would it be helpful if others did differently? (PAUSE)
Are you still the same person inside or have you changed? (PAUSE)
Do you think your family's perceptions of you would change? (PAUSE)
How would your friends or colleagues react? (PAUSE)
How might other people treat you? (PAUSE)
Now, think what it must be like for people with sight loss – or other disabilities?
Thank you – you can now open your eyes.
Does anyone have any feedback on the experience...?"

- “Get into twos – one stay seated whilst the other stands behind them...now move round to stand in front of them – now swap over. How did it feel? (intimidating) Now drop down onto one knee to be at the same height – and swap over. How does this feel? (equal). The point is to demonstrate that most wheelchair users value being talked with on the same level.”
- Get into twos – of similar height/weight/strength, wherever possible. One stand in line behind the other, both facing forward with a slight gap between each other...the person in front leans back and is ‘caught’ by the other – now swap over. How did it feel? (un-nerving) The point of this is to demonstrate that trust is an important issue for people with sight loss who have to trust others to assist or guide them. As blind people have to trust in people they can't see, what could we learn from them about relating to a God we can't see?”
- “Get into twos – without using sound and only through lip reading, communicate what you had for breakfast to the other person – now swap over. How did you find it? The point is to demonstrate that lip reading is a difficult skill for those with hearing loss to learn and usually only accurately pick-up on around 30% of words spoken so body language, gestures and facial expressions are important factors in communication.”

Get feedback on the activities.

Top Tips (5 mins)

- For wheelchair users: try and get on the same eye-level as them
- Remember a wheelchair is someone's personal space, so don't lean on it
- For people with mobility difficulties: having a chair nearby can help
- For people with sight loss: make sure there are no obstructions or trip-hazards
- To guide a blind person: offer your elbow for them to take hold of and walk half a step in front of them to lead them – keeping them informed of any entrances, steps, uneven or narrow places
- Have an ice cream container of water for guide dogs
- For people with speech impairment or learning disabilities – try and allow time for them to finish their sentence, and ask them to repeat something if you don't understand. People would prefer to say something again instead of being patronised

- For people with hearing loss – ensure you have eye contact before speaking; speak clearly but don't exaggerate words as this distorts your mouth
- For people on the autistic spectrum: difficulties with communication, eye contact or social 'rules' and repetitive behaviour are all features of autism so expectations should be clearly explained, and they may need a quiet space to escape sensory overload

Discuss any issues/questions/concerns anyone has with the purpose of reaching agreement as to how to manage expectations, and deciding what actions need to be taken.

9.0 What activities are suitable for an inclusive Festival?

With a little imagination and creative thought most regular Festival-type activities can be adapted slightly to make them more accessible and relevant to different needs. In addition, offering some specifically inclusive activities, such as the following, are always welcome...

- **Multi-sensory zone** – Multi-sensory activities are popular with everybody, especially those who have lost the use of one of their senses. Organise your zone area into different themed activities relating to sight, hearing, taste, touch and smell. Try the following:
 - **Feel and reveal** – Have five boxes with an object hidden in each. Visitors put their hand inside each one and try and guess what's inside.
 - **Blindfolded modelling** – make a model out of play dough whilst wearing eyeshades.
 - **Sensory path** – Set up a path consisting of different sections of gravel, sand, grass, tiles and pebbles. In bare feet, or shoes, visitors walk along the whole path. Encourage people to talk about their experience of walking over each section.
 - **Taste challenge** – dare to try different food and drinks and guess what they are e.g. chocolate, lentils, raisins, peppercorn, grape (*Try and avoid anything which could provoke an allergic reaction e.g. nuts, egg etc*)
 - **Wake up and smell the coffee!** Arrange different objects for people to smell, see and touch e.g. coffee, different flowers, grass, bread, lavender
 - Other ideas:
 - Touch: have trays available with touchy-feely stuff like cornflour and water, dried pasta, shaving foam etc, tactile balls, bubbles, velvet, bubble wrap, cotton wool, gauze sheets, basin of water and things to pour with etc (Be aware of people with tactile defensiveness, where someone has skin which is overly sensitive, and is wired directly to a part of the brain that interprets many kinds of touch as dangerous and/or painful.
 - Sound: have a CD player with different types of music; bells and shakers made from rice in plastic cups; wind chimes, rain makers. Tell stories in a very participatory way

e.g. spray water for rain, have toys/masks/objects/pictures to represent different elements of the story which can be handled

- Sight: Glow sticks, torches, mirrors, coloured or flashing lights, flags, ribbons, play parachute, foil
- **Inclusive sports zone**
 - **Goalball** is a three-a-side sport for players with sight loss, who all wear eyeshades and play with a ball containing an internal bell to hear and locate it during play.
 - Arrange a mini Goalball activity: Form a circle with legs apart and feet touching. Everyone close their eyes or cover them with eyeshades or a scarf. Players roll the bell-ball around/across the circle. Lose a point if the ball goes through your legs!
 - **Adapted Sports:** Choose a sport and adapt it so it is inclusive of all abilities...e.g.
 - Choose a larger ball to make it easier to hit/kick/catch;
 - Use a lower net
 - Increase the size and number of targets
 - Tee up the ball to keep it stationary and easier to hit
 - Play games on a table-top so people can play from a seated position
 - Play co-operatively to see how many passes you make, instead of most goals scored
 - Use brightly coloured or audible balls for people with sight or concentration difficulties
 - **Sitting Volleyball** is a six-a-side sport for players with reduced or no movement in their upper and lower limbs.
 - Try a mini-game: Blow up several balloons. Sit players on the floor in the form of a circle. Players work together to try and keep a balloon in the air for as many hits as possible. Increase the number of balloons or introduce a lightweight ball to make it harder. Divide the circle into two to introduce the concept of two teams playing against each other
- **Chill-out zone** – for some people, particularly those with autism or complex needs, overstimulation can lead to extreme anxiety and associated problems and so they may need a safe place to escape and calm down. Create a safe space with beanbags and soft mats to make an environment where people can sit/lie down in a more comfortable setting which is less busy. The zone could be located in a gazebo and be managed by adults with pastoral gifts, and who are CRB-checked to maintain appropriate safeguarding procedures.

- **Centre Games**

The centre games play an important part in the community festival and are at the heart of the event. This is where we can build the crowd and model what it is to be community: a Christian community of inclusivity, respect and care for each other. This can be difficult to comprehend because it is a challenge to bring people together and include everyone. However, when we take time to work at including those who are often excluded everyone's lives are truly enriched as we learn from each other.

When leading the games it is best to start and finish with a very inclusive game that all can be involved with, even if in-between some games require a greater level of mobility. In addition, it helps everyone, particularly those with learning difficulties, or perhaps sensory or mobility challenges if you follow the process, below:

- Clearly explain the game or activity
- Demonstrate the game, by those who have knowledge of the game
- Start the game, re-iterating the different elements as the activity progresses, giving no more than 2 or 3 instructions at a time

If you perceive people are missing out, you may want to run the game again with some slight adaptations to ensure everyone feels included, some ideas of which are given below...

Tug-of-war - This might be difficult for someone in a wheelchair, or with physical disability who struggles to grasp things, so the following real-life scenario should encourage you that it is possible for everyone to be incorporated...

At one inclusive festival a little girl in a wheelchair, supported by her grandpa, held onto the rope. With a huge smile she laughed excitedly and pulled on the rope. Grandpa was pulling back her chair so she could experience tugging the rope with her team mates. As the activity continued the team started to draw closer to her, making it possible for her to be fully involved. That's inclusivity at its basics; it is being aware of others around us and responding to them in a thoughtful way.

What's the time Mr Wolf? – Be aware that, if using a rope to demarcate the area, it could form a hazard for those with sight loss, mobility difficulties or in wheelchairs. For those who may not be able to run to escape the wolf, you could form teams with different roles for people e.g. some could be 'runners', others could 'cheer' on their team-mates.

Limbo – start as high as possible to enable everyone to achieve going under at least once or twice. When someone is 'out' they could be encouraged to support or cheer on others or be a judge.

Hokey Cokey – this can be made more accessible quite easily, e.g. slowing it down, or holding an object to 'put in' the middle as a substitute for 'putting your right foot in' etc

In the pond, out the pond – When the MC shouts 'in the pond', you jump in the pond and when they shout 'out the pond' you jump out. For those who find this difficult you could, similar to the Hokey Cokey, put 'in/out' hands, or an object, instead of physically jumping.

Clowns – Be aware that some children (not just those with additional needs) are uncomfortable around clowns and sometimes find them scary, so some sensitivity is needed if children are assessed as being hesitant.

It is important to assess the games you use beforehand and plan to use a selection that you know are accessible for people with a range of needs. However, if you are always thinking 'how can I be inclusive?' and you model this then all things are possible.

10.0 What should we say, or not say, to a disabled person?

Many people are confused by terminology and are often intimidated by what is 'right', or not right, to say. Although specific phrases change over time, our language should come from our heart. General principles to remember are that our words should be:

- **Precise** – use the term 'wheelchair user' rather than 'wheelchair bound' or 'confined to a wheelchair'
- **Personal** – use the term 'disabled people', not 'the disabled', 'handicapped', 'crippled'
- **Positive** – show recognition and value of the person e.g. 'a person with...cerebral palsy/sight loss', rather than 'suffering from', 'crippled with', 'victim of'

11.0 What next? Further inclusive resources

- **'Inclusive principles'** – This one-page checklist gives 17 tips to encourage churches to ensure that disabled people are included in every aspect of church life. Available from www.throughtheroof.org/inclusive-principles
- **'Enabling Church'** is a 112 page book whose aim is to resource Christians to understand disability from a biblical perspective. The material is presented in seven sessions ideal for small groups, with Bible study discussion questions, activities, prayer and worship suggestions, and real-life interviews with disabled people. Available from www.throughtheroof.org/shop or in braille, large print and audio editions from Torch Trust www.torchtrust.org
- **Charter for inclusion** – Livability and Through the Roof are collaborating to highlight the need for churches to become inclusive places that welcome disabled people. They are asking individuals and churches to sign the pledge and commit themselves to working towards making their churches welcoming and inclusive. Visit www.churchesinc.org.uk
- **'Sign Me In!'** This policy offers valuable advice on the inclusion of Deaf, sign language users. Available from Go! Sign, Voice/fax: 01702 613113, Minicom: 01702 613114, Email: general@gosign.org, website: www.gosign.org.uk and www.christiansigns.co.uk
- **'Foursight for the church'** – Printed material, DVD and training to include people with sight loss. Available from www.torch-foursight.org

- **'One Big Family'** – Resource pack and DVD to promote awareness and action to include people with learning disabilities and their families. Available by contacting Esther Kuganja, Resources Co-ordinator, tel: 0118 951 6980
- **'Symbols of Faith'** – a course in symbolic catechesis for all, also guidelines on how to promote inclusion and a section on home ministry. Available from gailw@stjoseph.org.uk
- **'Lasting Values'** is a resource for youth leaders, based on the 4 Paralympic values. Written by Christian disability charity, Through the Roof, in partnership with ALOVE - the expression of The Salvation Army for young people, it is available to download free from www.throughtheroof.org/lasting-values
- **'Cell Plus'** is inclusive cell group material, written by ALOVE, and is available from www.salvationarmy.org.uk/love
- **'Parachute Bible Stories'** are 20 inclusive stories with directions for using a play parachute to deliver a hands-on Bible experience for all abilities. Available from www.throughtheroof.org/shop
- **'Removing Barriers'** – Printed self-assessment tool for churches to check how inclusive of disabled people their activities are. Available from: www.throughtheroof.org/shop/
- **'Be a Roofbreaker'** – Publication giving practical tips to include people with different disabilities. Available from www.throughtheroof.org/shop

Explore Christian outreach to Deaf and disabled people – for further advice, resources and training from Christian Deaf and disability organisations with specific skills and experience, visit the website of 'Churches for All' (a collaborative network of Christian, disability organisations, working in partnership with Premier Life, part of the Premier Christian Media group) at: www.churchesforall.org.uk. Our aim is to help churches create and sustain an environment where disabled people can participate fully in church life for the benefit of all.

Paralympic-themed Festival

The 2012 Paralympic Games welcomed 4,000 disabled sportsmen and sportswomen to London and sought to emulate its motto, 'Spirit in Motion'. The Games valued and recognised each competitor equally as an athlete, celebrated every individual's God-given talent, and provided accessible facilities and assistance to ensure a truly rewarding and inclusive experience.

Our prayer is that we could say the same about the church. As God's people, will we seize the baton together to invite disabled people to join God's Spirit in Motion?