



“Nowhere to Go”

Improving access to toilets for people with disabilities in Northumberland

First Workshop Report, September 2017

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<https://action.crohnsandcolitis.org.uk/ea-action/action?ea.client.id=1995&ea.campaign.id=54733>

The Project

“Nowhere to Go” aims to promote social justice by improving access to appropriate public toilet facilities in Northumberland for disabled people and their carers. The project is managed by Newcastle University and Carers Northumberland, who are working in collaboration with people with disabilities and their carers.

We aim to:

- identify the issues faced by disabled people and their carers accessing appropriate toilets
- build cross-sector partnerships
- examine potential solutions
- develop funding applications to implement proposed solutions

Workshop

We held the first project workshop on 8 September 2017 at Ashington Community and Voluntary Association. There were 13 participants in the workshop:

Prof Derek Bell (Politics Dept Newcastle University), Jane Grayloo (Disability North), Veronica Jones (Councillor, NCC), Mary Hull (Newcastle University), Elizabeth Johnston (In it Together), Deborah Lowden, (Age UK), Prof Janice McLaughlin (Newcastle University), Libby Morrison (Newcastle University), Liz Prudhoe (Adapt), Sharon Spurling (Carers Northumberland), Michelle Stoker (Central Users Forum), Leanne Thompson, (Central Users Forum) Helen Williams (Alzheimer’s Society)

The objectives of the workshop were:

- To review what we learned from the first stage of the project
- To identify priorities for the second stage of the project, including suggestions for potential actions that would improve access to appropriate toilet facilities
- To identify appropriate ways to involve service users in the second stage of the project

Reviewing what we learned from the first stage of the project

In the first stage of the project, we interviewed representatives of key organisations. We identified seven important issues: lack of appropriate toilet facilities; lack of “Changing Places” toilets; quality and cleanliness; signage, standardisation and planning; stigma and embarrassment; who are accessible toilets for; lack of information availability; and incontinence (see our ‘Interim Report’ for more details). Our interviewees also suggested some actions that might make a difference, including: an awareness raising campaign; providing easy access to information through maps, apps and websites; involving local businesses; influencing planners/architects to prioritise accessibility of new builds;

campaigning to increase the number of Changing Places toilets; and having incontinence pads available to buy in toilets.

The participants at the workshop recognised the importance of all of these issues and made many additional suggestions for action. We noted that some issues might be tackled at the local level while others would require action beyond Northumberland. The value of identifying and collaborating with potential partners already working on some of these issues was emphasised.

Priorities and suggestions for further work

From the discussion, we have identified three strands of potential work.

1. Raising Awareness and Campaigning.

- There was general agreement on the importance of raising awareness of how people's lives are affected by lack of access to appropriate toilets. Suggestions for action included gathering more evidence of the numbers of people affected and their stories of how they are affected. It was suggested that using visual and social media (e.g., making films for youtube) might be an effective way of communicating with more people.
- There was a lot of discussion of public understanding of "disability" and who should be using "accessible" toilets. Suggestions for action included promoting alternative signage, following the example of some supermarkets and developments in Scotland.
- There was agreement on the value of "naming and praising" good toilets, which are accessible, clean and well-designed. It was suggested that we might explore potential links with Disabled Go or the British Toilet Association to consider how best to do this in Northumberland ("Flush with Pride").

2. Improving access to toilets in public, commercial and voluntary sector premises

- There was agreement that sometimes minor changes could make big differences for people. One suggestion was to explore ways of working with other existing initiatives (e.g., Dementia Friends) or statutory bodies (e.g., Northumberland Health and Well Being Board) to promote accessibility audits and education for property owners.
- There was very little awareness of the Northumberland 'You're Welcome' community toilets scheme. Veronica Jones, Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care at Northumberland County Council, suggested she could request that responsibility for the community toilets scheme be transferred to adult social care. This might facilitate collaborative working to develop a more successful community toilets scheme. The importance of "selling" the benefits of the scheme to businesses was emphasised.
- There are very few Changing Places toilets in Northumberland. It was suggested that we might try to work with Changing Places to increase the number.
- There was agreement that changes to the planning system and more effective use of local authority powers were likely to be important in the long-term. Suggestions for action included developing a better understanding of relevant planning regulations and finding ways of making local authorities more aware of their powers. The potential for

Northumberland County Council and major landowners, notably the Duke of Northumberland, to “lead by example” was highlighted. The possibility of investigating (and developing) resources for planners and planning students was also suggested.

3. Improving the availability, quality and reliability of information

- There was agreement that reliable information about accessible toilets is problematic locally and nationally. There are a number of different organisations which provide information. Participants suggested that we might “join up the dots” and seek to improve the availability and quality of information about what accessibility features a particular toilet has (e.g., equipment lists, dimensions, access). The importance of ensuring that information was kept up-to-date was emphasised. There was also discussion of the best ways of making the information available and alternative communication channels or partnerships (e.g., tourist information, Dementia Friends, Carers Northumberland and other partner organisations).

Involving service users in the next stage of the project

It is important that we identify the difficulties service users face, the coping mechanisms they have developed and the short and long-term changes that would make a difference to their lives. We discussed who to involve and how we might involve them.

There was strong support for making sure that we involve some of the “hidden” groups of people that might be particularly affected, including both older and younger age groups, and people with “hidden” problems, such as those taking water tablets for heart conditions. Participants in the workshop identified a range of opportunities for involving their own service users, carers and support workers in the next stage of the project.

We also discussed different methods of involving people, including: a survey; individual and small group interviews; site visits and “mystery poopers”; video recording of experiences or video evidence; presenting the project to service user groups; and connecting to people through social media.

We outline a provisional plan of action for the second stage of the project below. We would welcome comments and suggestions on the plan of action and on any aspect of this report.

Actions for Research Team – (Newcastle University and Carers Northumberland)

- Undertake survey and interviews
- Produce key findings document for March workshop
- Investigate existing evidence (including visual) of accessibility issues and consider innovative data gathering
- Develop further partnership links which can be used to share information and identify best practice
- Understand more fully existing policies that relate to planning and regulations
- Explore the potential for collaboration with relevant University planning and design departments
- Examine publicity initiatives using local media and other outlets in the region

Action for workshop participants:

- Support distribution of survey once ready for roll out
- Identify events we can present the work to, in order to recruit participants for interview
- Share knowledge of best practice in provision of accessible toilets they are aware of
- Share information they have on planning guidance, regulation and other documentary evidence
- Explore in their organisations any opportunities they have to raise accessibility issues and make changes
- Respond to requests for information/queries by us as we explore possible activities further



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