



# Improving access to toilets for people with disabilities in Northumberland

(<https://research.ncl.ac.uk/nowheretogo/>)

Second Workshop Report, March 2018

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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 toilet facilities in Northumberland for disabled people and their carers. The project is co-run by Newcastle University and Carers Northumberland, who are working in collaboration with a number of partner organisations, service users and 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.

### **What we have done so far**

- Carried out interviews with representatives from: Northumberland County Council (NCC), Adapt NE, In it Together, Disability North, Age UK Northumberland, Alzheimer’s Northumberland and WECAN – May/July 2017.
- Produced an [interim report](#) based on these interviews – August 2017.
- Held a workshop with partner organisations – September 2017.
- Produced a [workshop report](#) agreeing next steps – September 2017
- Attended several meetings with councillors and officers at NCC – December 2017 and January 2018
- Produced a briefing document for NCC on useful links and resources to aid their provision of accessible toilet provision – January 2018
- Held discussions with service users and volunteers – December 2017/February 2018

### **Discussions with Service Users and Volunteers**

We have undertaken a series of discussions with service users, paid staff and volunteers from a number of organisations across Northumberland:

- Stoma Support Group Berwick
- Age UK Ashington
- Alzheimer’s Ashington
- Central User Forum Blyth
- BID Services Morpeth (who support people who are deaf, hard of hearing, visually impaired or have a dual sensory loss)

In total we talked to 62 people – 34 service users, 23 volunteers and 5 paid staff members. Most discussions took place in arranged group settings, a small number occurred via telephone conversations. The discussions focussed on four key areas which had been identified during the previous workshop: NCC's Community Toilet scheme 'You're Welcome to Use our Loo', Changing Places toilets, signage and best practice/what could make a difference.

Participants highlighted numerous difficulties which they faced on a day to day basis when trying to access suitable toilet facilities. One wheelchair user said she often 'gave up and went home' after unsuccessfully trying to find an accessible toilet. Another participant said she didn't go out anymore as it was too difficult. One person with a visual impairment carried a torch as lighting was often inadequate. Several people had experienced discriminatory behaviour from members of the public including negative comments and 'being lectured' because they had used an accessible toilet when they didn't 'look disabled'.

With an ageing population including increasing numbers of people with dementia, incontinence issues were becoming more common and it was felt important that Northumberland should have improved toilet provision.

## **Main Findings from Discussions with Service Users**

### **a) Community Toilet Scheme**

- Only two out of 62 people we spoke to had heard of 'Use our Loo.'
- The majority thought the scheme was a good idea.
- People felt the 'Use our Loo' sign needs to be improved.
- Most people did not use NCC's website to get information on toilets.
- Most people thought reliability of information online about toilets could be problematic.
- People reported seeing signs in shops and cafes saying 'only customers can use our toilets.'
- Suggestions where the scheme might be successfully advertised included: GP surgeries, bus stations, shops, cafes, tourist information, citizens advice, church newsletters, display boards and the Golden Guide.
- Places suggested as good additions to a community toilets scheme were: Weatherspoon, Costa, and GP surgeries. Some people wanted more toilets available in the countryside and some felt town centres should be prioritised over tourist sites.
- People had mixed views about using pubs as community loos – they can be very dark, some older people and women expressed reservations about using pubs.

- Some group discussions raised the issue of unisex toilets – some people said they wouldn't mind using them, but a number of people were strongly opposed to them.
- Hexham, Alnwick, Bedlington, Berwick and Bamburgh were areas where toilet provision was considered poor.
- Morpeth toilet provision was singled out as very good by most.
- There were mixed responses to the idea of paying in some way (for example a donation). A number of people said they would resent having to pay and that it might encourage theft, whereas others said they would be happy to pay if the toilet was good and that it might encourage businesses to sign up to the scheme.

#### b) Changing Places (CP) Toilets

- Very few people had heard of Changing Places toilets.
- Only 4 people recognised the CP sign – a number commented that the sign was unclear.
- Most people thought there should be more provision of CP toilets.
- Some concern that allowing people to use Changing Places toilets in some buildings could generate risk for other users of the building.

#### c) Signage

- All participants raised the problem of on-street signs – they should be at the entrance to a town or village, bigger, more of them, arrows pointing more clearly to the road and should include the distance to the toilet.
- Almost all participants thought the 'Not Every Disability is Visible' sign removed assumptions that wheelchair use was the determinate of disability. Service users at the stoma group thought it was very important as they had experienced negative comments from the public. The sign should be bigger and include a picture of a toilet.
- Participants at all groups thought a picture of a toilet on signs would be helpful to most people.
- Signs for male or female toilets which were not easily distinguishable could be confusing, for example signs in a different language.
- Signs to tell people how to get out of a toilet were important. More than half of participants had struggled to find their way out of a toilet at some time.

- Illuminated signs, colours which are bright, bold and contrasting and signs with a clear edge can be important to people with a visual impairment.

#### d) Information for a best practice guide

The project is developing a best practice guide to how to enhance accessible toilet provision and people's ability to use them in Northumberland. Participants offered many suggestions we will draw from in detail, the top 5 suggestions were:

- Better information on toilet location – a single point of contact, preferably telephone, was viewed positively by four groups. Most people did not think that NCC would be best to provide this – local groups or organisations would be better placed to provide up to date information and have local knowledge. Information on the location of community toilets, changing places toilets and accessible facilities could be provided on town maps using standardised and clear signs.
- More toilets.
- Improved cleanliness – this was considered important by all groups.
- Easier to use taps – not being able to wash hands is a public health issue. Participants suggested that the taps used in hospitals are ideal.
- A Campaign using video testimony to tackle stigma and discrimination by raising awareness that 'Not Every Disability is Visible'.



(<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/disability-37896012>)