

Equality of Opportunity Committee

EOC(3)-14-10 : Paper 2

Inquiry into the impact of Welsh Government policy on the accessibility of transport services for disabled people in Wales – Evidence from Monmouth People First

To highlight the issues adults with physical and learning disabilities experience in Monmouth, and the surrounding rural areas, we have included two case studies. The purpose is to demonstrate the barriers to all aspects of these people's lives due to the lack of accessible transport. For the purpose of this report the characters are loosely based on a combination of people we represent or have worked with in the past.

Susan is a late middle aged woman with a chronic health condition and mild to moderate learning difficulties. Susan has lived with her family in an isolated rural area all her life. Susan's needs have only recently been identified and it appears she has never had the opportunity to reach her potential even though she is quite capable and wants to be in paid work. These are some of the barriers Susan encounters.

- Though Susan would like to be in paid work she remains working as part of a social enterprise scheme for which she is not paid. Susan can spend up to four hours a day on the day service bus as she is often the last to be dropped off and the first to be picked up. On days when other people are not being picked up Susan travels by taxi which is paid for by the Local Authority. Susan is very upset that after accessing the social enterprise and receiving training for several years, she is still not in paid work.
- Due to Susan's social exclusion, she is supported by an Independent Living Worker once a week. Susan would like to be able to go shopping or to attend an adult education class every week independently, but as there is no public transport Susan would have to pay £42 to use a taxi service to get her there and back.
- As a result of Susan's social exclusion Susan has not had the opportunity to become confident enough to gain the knowledge to, for example, go on holiday using public transport or even go to the pub or the cinema.
- Susan has a sister ten miles away who she is very close to, but they only see each other twice a year due to transport issues, her sister is not well enough to travel and Susan cannot afford to get a taxi there more often.

- Susan has friends in a nearby village but she can only see them when she attends her day centre 20 miles away.

Peter is a young man full of aspirations. He lives with his elderly mother who is reluctant to drive and his father died six years ago. Peter lives in a semi-rural area with difficult access, due to a narrow lane which some public transport vehicles refuse to navigate. Peter has complex physical disabilities and uses a wheelchair at all times. All his life, Peter has been denied access to emotional and environmental opportunities that could have led to him being fully integrated into the community, and in full-time work. Many of Peter's learning difficulties could be seen to be as a result of these barriers and exclusion.

- Since leaving school, Peter has attempted to continue in further education with the aim of working in a school as a classroom assistant. Transport issues have stopped Peter from, for example, attending a literacy class; although at one point he was using 'Dial-A-Ride', the service stopped and was replaced by 'GrassRoutes', who would not travel to his rural location. Peter thus had to pull out of his class.
- Peter would like to gain experience in a youth service as a volunteer. Peter has explored transport possibilities but realises that the only option for him would be to ask his mother, which he does not feel comfortable doing due to her age. These are barriers that stop Peter getting into employment.
- Peter would like to visit friends to go wheelchair dancing, however he would be unable to go without the help of his mother or by using a local taxi firm. Peter enquired how much this would cost and was very upset to discover it would cost £50 because it required a taxi that could transport a wheelchair. The journey is less than 11 miles away and takes only 20 minutes.
- Peter had an appointment to see his GP. His mother was unable to take him at short notice due to illness. His social worker was in a meeting. Peter did not have enough benefit left that week so could not order a taxi. Peter had no choice but to cancel the appointment.

Susan and Peter are unable to attain 'the right to an ordinary pattern of life within the community', in accordance with WAG Learning Disability Strategy (s. 7) Guidance on Service Principles and Service Responses (2004),

We have just highlighted the lack of opportunity and social exclusion issues. We have not addressed the physical barriers to access transport such as, wheelchair access, insufficient taxi's that are equipped to take people who use wheelchairs, and the limitations of availability of public transport. It should also be noted that there are issues around people's vulnerability including using money, fear of bullying, and lack of life experience. This is an endemic problem - Susan will soon be reaching retirement age and it seems unlikely she will ever be in any employment, which she definitely wants and could achieve with the right opportunity. Hopefully, the issues with transport will be addressed so that Peter can fulfil his potential and be part of the workforce, and feel valued within society.

Though on paper it would appear there are opportunities, the stark reality is that it is impossible for any of our members to feel empowered to do anything spontaneously, unless they use a taxi and have support freely available. It is another area where people with a learning disability remain disempowered.

The reason we responded to this questionnaire initially was because these examples have been typical of our group's experience for as long as they can remember and as facilitators we wanted to acknowledge the difficulties and 'learned helplessness' that our members face every day due to the lack of opportunity.

Monmouth People First
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