Accessing Activities 'What we heard'

Autumn meetups 2023

In Autumn 2023, we held a series of meetups on the accessibility of activities. A total of 48 people came to 6 in-person meetups. The people who came were mostly disabled people and people with mental health conditions. Professionals attended some meetups. This report is a summary of what we heard.

Key themes

Challenges:

Accessibility

Poor attitude and awareness

Lack of opportunities

Support and independence

Technology

Positive experiences:

Accessible activities

Technology

Good attitude and awareness

Ideas:

Better awareness and training

Better attitudes

More opportunities

Improve accessibility

More collaboration and partnership

Self-determination and confidence

Part 1 – Barriers and challenges

At Barnwood Circle meetups disabled people and people with mental health conditions shared barriers and challenges that they experience when accessing activities in Gloucestershire.

Key themes:

- Accessibility
- Poor attitude and awareness
- Lack of opportunities
- Support and independence
- Technology

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1. Accessibility

a. Environment

- Physical accessibility is a barrier to doing what you want to do.

- Venues lack accountability upholding the law; not taking accessibility requirements into consideration e.g., cups without holders, location of the toilets.

- There are entertainment venues and restaurants in the town centre (Montpellier square) which can only be accessed by steps.

- Venues can be too noisy and small (little to no access).

- Venues with bright lights.

- Dark equipment and interiors/glass panelling in gyms; not good for visual impairment.

- Venues are not clear on their accessibility.

- Not enough signage outside and inside venues with audio for those who struggle to read/see.

- Colleges/universities are not prepared; there aren't the structures or assets in place for disabled students.

- Not a lot of accessible toilets in towns and venues.

- Organisations don't listen or take advice on how they can make their services more accessible.

- Accessibility is limited in rural areas.

"There is no lift to the 2nd floor at the Living Room in Chipping Norton. If you use a wheelchair, you have to sit at the very front on the first floor. The website doesn't specify which films are on which floor".

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- Scaffolding on buildings because they are old makes a lot of the building inaccessible.

- Town centres need more benches.

- Not enough ramps to get into shops.

- Lifts too small for wheelchair users.

- Broken lifts e.g., Cineworld Cheltenham.

- Very difficult to sit next to another wheelchair user in the cinema. If we want to go with a friend, we have to sit separately.

- No accessible parking.

- Wrong use of accessible toilets e.g., baby changing unit, gender neutral toilet.

- Providing equipment not fit for purpose e.g., swimming hoists.

- Not enough disabled changing places in swimming venues.

- Fewer accessible swimming activities post-lockdown.

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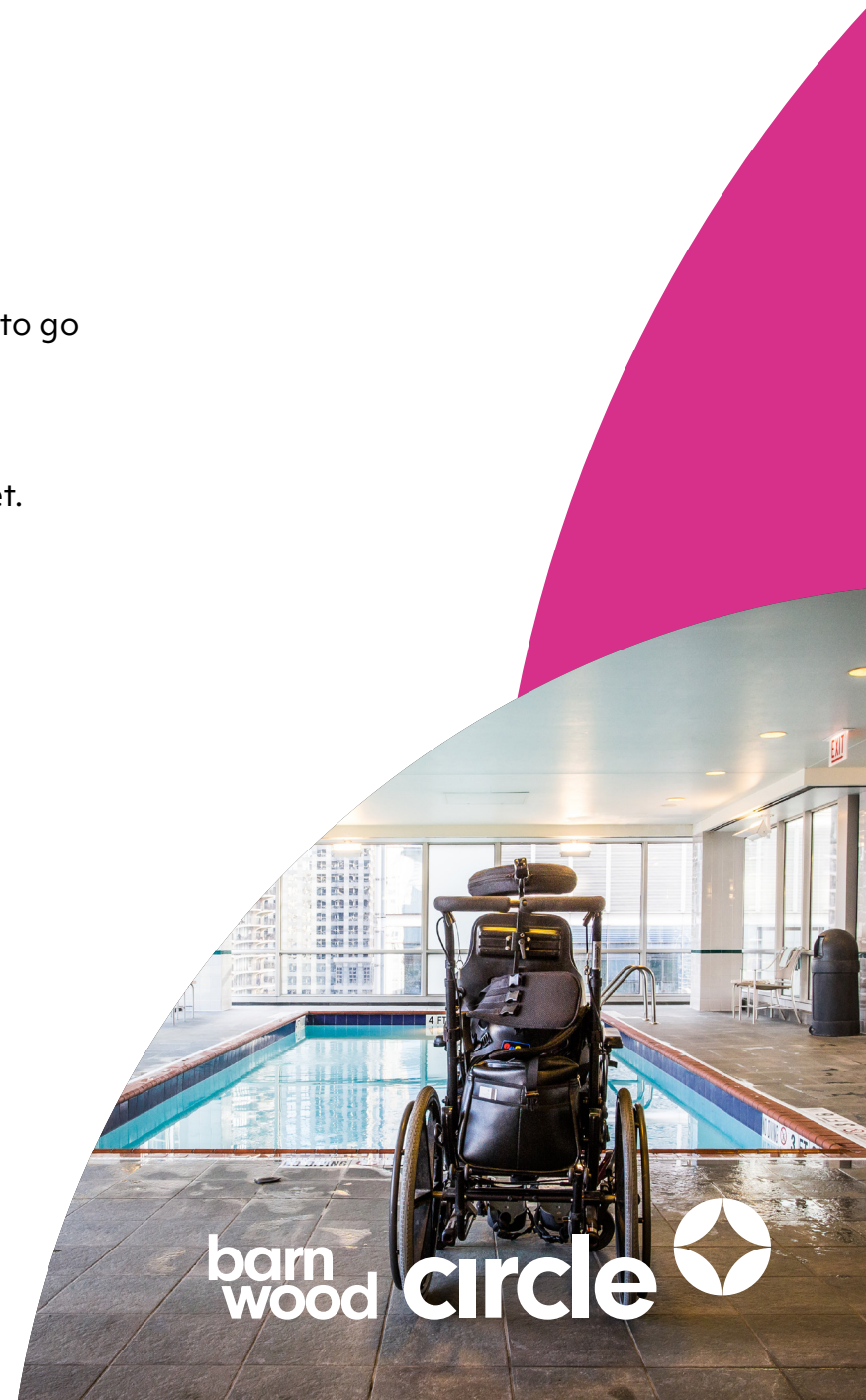
b. Transport

⬡ Transport access is limited; can't use disability card until after 10am.

⬡ Affordability of an accessible taxi has a huge impact and makes a difference to people's experiences.

⬡ Cotswold roads around tourist villages are congested, making it hard to get to other places.

⬡ Not enough trains, buses, cycle paths nor voluntary car services to get to activities.

⬡ Disabled people tend to be the last people to be assisted off the coach, train, or plane. People get anxious and feel they may have been forgotten.

⬡ Disabled people have less options, availability, flexibility, parking etc.

⬡ Connexions service set up for people with limited access to transport has not been reliable.

c. Information

⬡ Too much jargon used at GP surgeries.

⬡ Poor advertisement of what is available e.g., councils.

⬡ Finding out what is available can be difficult.

⬡ Information overload makes it easy to miss out things.

"Cost of taxis and timings to get accessible taxis prevents me from going to activities."

"I love being outside in the country and in nature but limited to where I can go in a wheelchair."

"Unless you speak with people, you have no clue what exist or might not get the full information needed."

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2.   Poor attitude and awareness

- Poor awareness of disability.

- Poor flexibility and staff availability.

- A lot less is done for people with hidden disabilities than those with physical disabilities.

- People making wrong assumptions about someone's disability/ability.

- Imbalance in the way people apply their strategies, consideration is often given to one type of disability i.e., focusing on physical and forgetting neurodiversity, visual or hearing impairment.

- People with hearing impairments were not being spoken to directly, so they found it hard to lip read.

- Some staff can be judgemental.

- Most activity providers are either ignorant or driven by the profit they can get.

- Activities are poorly managed with poor awareness of different disabilities.

- People can be patronising; highlighting access requirements in a derogatory way puts people off.

"People don't see us when we are out shopping, they ignore us."

"I don't want to go along if I am going to be constantly misunderstood."

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- Other people who attend activities can sometimes make it intimidating, closed or quite cliquey.

- Lack of consistency across events or venues i.e., consistent offer of BSL at all events.

- Fear of rejection or discrimination.

- Disability being overlooked and no one seems to care e.g., council meetings.

- Lack of flexibility with GP appointment times

- No continuity of care; get a different GP every time

"I find everything I attend I am rejected because there is a lack of understanding and awareness."

"I went to a local public swimming pool and when I asked a member of the public how to get in the pool because I have a visual impairment, they offered to help me, but it was in a really patronising way."

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3. Lack of opportunities

- There is nothing for local families, particularly for activities like swimming. GL1 leisure centre has been closed.

- In rural areas there isn't a range of facilities available such as leisure centres.

- Not enough community infrastructure.

- Not enough opportunities to get involved in activities

- Cost of activities are too high; people on low income or benefits cannot afford them.

- Huge administrative costs are often deducted from money fund raised for organisations, which means less money goes into actual activity provision.

- Activities are held in the evenings.

- Many people attending lunch clubs are over 70, nothing much offered for younger people.

- Social services prioritising the wrong things to manage.

- Funding limitations with activities.

"I'd like to be able to go to an adult disco but without the alcohol that's involved in going to a club."

"Social services do not see the psychological side of you, they focus on the money being spent."

SORRY WE ARE CLOSED

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4. Support and independence

- Facilitation of activities can sometimes be too formal.

- Not having enough PAs and volunteers to assist with activities.

- Some activities can end up being too competitive and people's expectations can be too high.

- Labelling of people can become a barrier to doing what they want to do.

- No independence.

5. Technology

- Use of QR codes to gain access to the gym.

- Gym membership not accessible to manage; it all has to be done online and it is difficult to navigate.

- Need better integrated IT systems, poor communications between healthcare providers.

- Lack of education in using new technologies.

- Older generations might find it hard accessing technology, making it hard to find out about activities.

- Lack of accessible booking systems.

"I prefer to be independent, go on my own and do things for myself."

"My biggest challenge is PA reliance. If no one is available or there is a change of PA staff, that really impacts my accessibility to activities."

"My biggest nightmare is getting on zoom calls; people say things like 'all you have to do is...' but I can't do that because I can't see. When my PA is not there, I can't access zoom activities."

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Part 2 - Positive experiences

At the meetups people shared positive experiences of accessing activities. They talked about accessible activities, technology, and good attitude and awareness.

Key themes:

Accessible activities

Technology

Good attitude and awareness

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1. Accessibility

- Frame running at Black Bridge Athletics track is good and could be better with more staff on the ground.

- Adult education does some good accessible activities.

- Barnwood is a good example of how activities can be made more accessible.

- Headway offers all kinds of activities.

- Hundred Heroins offers therapeutic art projects for women at Eastgate Centre, GWR tapestry project, arts for wellbeing etc.

- Social prescribing.

- Everyman Theatre staff are very accommodating and offer a touch tour organised by Insights Gloucestershire. You get a tour/talk of the auditorium, audio description of the layout, stage, lunch, and performance.

- Nottgrove Village Hall installed sound absorbing acoustic clouds.

- Quiz Night in Stanton; people are very friendly, and it's supported with a What'sApp group. Good for meeting others.

- The Community Hub near Chepstow has been transformative for the community.

- Gym at Northleach is really good.

- The Friendship Café is good and accessible.

- Overfarm market is very accessible.

- Crickley Hill and Robinswood use trampers, but you have to book in advance.

"I love doing this because when I am on the frame, everything is good."

"I like going there because they offer tailored gym sessions for people of all shapes, sizes and abilities."

"Using trampers means I can go 'off-road' in my wheelchair."

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2.   Technology

- The Euan's guide gives accessibility information about a location or venue.

- You can get useful information on the Healthwatch Gloucestershire website.

- Your Circle is a guide to what is available to you in the county.

- Inclusion Gloucestershire is running a digital inclusion programme which helps to find out what's out there.

- Everyman Theatre's website has extensive and dedicated area around access to the theatre and easy to navigate.

- Be My Eyes mobile phone app is good.

- You're Welcome website is good for activities.

- Next Door app is good for seeing what's going on locally.

- Cheltenham Festivals offers 360 virtual experience of festival spaces and venues.

3.   Good attitude and awareness

- Gym staff knowing about access requirements.

- Good and skilled facilitators during activities.

- Being treated equally.

"They had a good tutor that explained things from a very basic level and used language that everyone understood."

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Part 3 - Opportunities, ideas and solutions

People offered ideas on how access to activities can be improved for disabled people and people with mental health conditions.

Key themes:

- Better awareness and training
- Better attitudes
- More opportunities
- Improve accessibility
- More collaboration and partnership
- Self-determination and confidence

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1. Better awareness and training

- Staff being aware of an individual's requirements.

- Getting people to experience what it feels/looks like to be disabled.

- Employing people with lived experience to be a liaison officer, so that they can help people across the board e.g., cinemas, leisure centres, restaurants.

- Raise awareness of mental health and offer better provision of activities tailored to mental health.

- Having a safe space to discuss accessibility with providers, so people can learn and take action.

- Should be made law that all companies/colleges have special training for their staff, especially those involved in activity provision.

- Make general public more aware by putting badges in entertainment places to offer support to people with disability e.g., 'Autism friendly'.

- Local press having adverts to raise more awareness of physical and non-physical disability.

- Government needs to do more to raise awareness of different types of disability across the board.

- Having people present with lived experience at meetups is important. The changes offered to people need to be sustainable and this needs to be something that can grow and can be shared wider.

"People being aware of me arriving at an activity is helpful for me. I get anxious if I am not directed properly to where I need to go."

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- Drawing on good examples of accessible activities and sharing data/info across organisations will help bring about greater change.

- Sharing case studies and people's stories is the best way to bring about improvement for accessibility.

- At Forest Sensory Services, VR headsets are used for people to experience what it is like to have a visual impairment. More organisations/activity providers should have this training, so they can really understand what it is like.

- Educating people and raising greater awareness of what is and isn't accessible for disabled people.

"People would do more activities if they were made welcome and those around them were aware. This creates a better society and outcome."

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2.   Better attitudes

- Challenging and changing the stereotypes around disability from can't do to can do.

- People's attitudes need to change – the language we use around disabled people has changed, but people's attitudes haven't.

- Services openly welcoming feedback to improve accessibility.

- Addressing working culture in organisations is important.

- People should be more honest about the facilities they have available. Activity providers should have 'accessibility statements' so people can find beforehand what activities are accessible and what aren't.

- Accessibility for disability comes from the people and social change.

- Better relationships with GPs and patients have far better outcomes.

"Unless you wear it, you don't know what it's like."

"There are small changes that can be made to help individuals access activities more easily but also there are greater social/cultural changes that need to be made to make activities more accessible on a wider scale."

Accessibility

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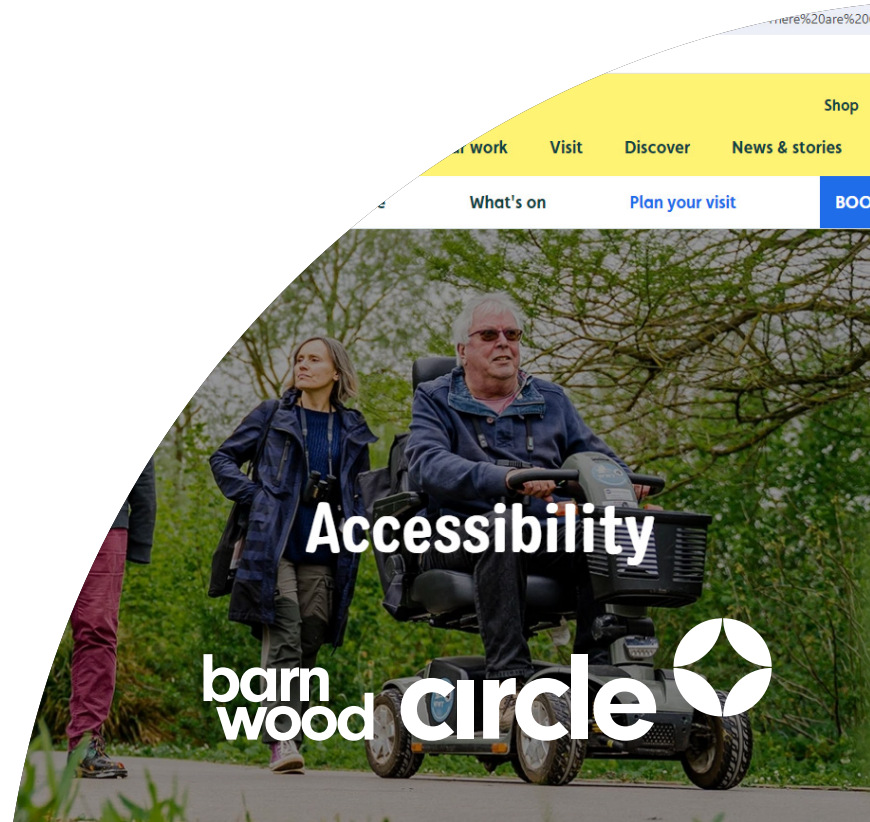
3.   More opportunities

- Having more funding for accessible activities.

- Having more volunteers to assist with activities.

- Buddy/peer support for people accessing activities or events.

- More activities should be offered around specific conditions or groups e.g., neurodiverse cinema sessions, women only swimming clubs.

- Need more evening activities available. A lot of the daytime activities only cater for the elderly.

- There should be activities available to share skills like dry stone walling, willow weaving, and knitting.

- More free adult education courses available

- More intergenerational learning – opportunities for learning first aid, sign language, Braille, should be open to all.

- Set up WhatsApp groups to arrange lift shares to activities.

- Local farms could encourage children and young people, disabled people, and people with mental health conditions to connect and learn about animals, their local environment and produce by offering demonstrations and workshops.

- There should be more equine therapy available for people in rural areas.

- Having access to equipment can really impact the kinds of activities people are able to participate in e.g., the right wheelchair, larger pens, larger computer screens.

- More youth clubs and different things to do.

- Fewer rules and regulations which are barriers for setting up activities.

- There should be short taster sessions available for people to try before they have to commit to paying for several weeks ahead.

- There needs to be more sporting activity groups for teenagers.

4.   More collaboration and partnership

- Co-create/co-design activities with the community.
- Activity providers should work alongside people to make activities accessible and enjoyable.
- Sharing volunteers across different groups in small communities
- It's important how we frame our stories to others.
- There needs to be better representation of disabled people at organisations.
- Give people a genuine voice; ask the service users/customers what are the questions that you want answered?
- Building stronger and more connected communities.

"Involve people with disabilities and mental health challenges in planning and decision making."

"Top down doesn't work. We need to listen to the community & disabled people."

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5.   Improve accessibility

- Actively invite feedback on how access can be improved and act on it.

- Stop using the pandemic as an excuse for the lack of accessible facilities at venues.

- More disabled toilets.

- More accessible parking.

- More ramps and level access to venues.

- Understanding different needs and disabilities to be able to meet access requirements.

- Having quiet spaces available e.g., in restaurants.

- Making better use of resources e.g., cinema facility at Redesdale Hall, using schools for public activities

- Different ways of advertising activities e.g., radio, website, leaflets.

- Sharing findings and data on accessibility to avoid duplication across organisations.

- Solution sharing: highlighting 'successful interventions'. what worked and how it made a difference.

- Local directories for events, activities, shops and services.

- Having a hub for accessibility and strategic coordination.

- Good signposting to help people know what's available.

- Frequently asked questions should be provided in different formats.

"I cannot drink a cup of tea in the same way most other people do. I take it upon myself to use a straw."

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- More accessible transport.

- Use of voice activated technology to enable greater accessibility and independence.

- Exploring and using new technology e.g., apps, 360° views, AI.

- Offering 360° experiences of events gives people options to attend the event in a way that suits them e.g., the immersive storytelling lab at Oakley Community Centre.

- There should be an electronic interactive noticeboard for activities and other local updates, like they have at the Doctor's surgery.

- More accessible shopping times allocated for people who require a quieter space and need more time.

"A lot of supermarkets used to offer this during the pandemic but now not so many supermarkets do."

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6. Self-determination and confidence

- Setting small goals for yourself is important, e.g., to meditate, find social groups, go to a new activity and connect.

- Be proactive; don't just complain, do something yourself.

- People need encouragement and to be empowered to effect change.

- People power and campaigning.

- Having the determination and self-belief to achieve can overcome obstacles.

"It's not all about the environment. Some of it has to come from within you."

"I went round all the shops in Bishops Cleeve that were not wheelchair accessible and challenged them. Some of them addressed the issue and purchased ramps. I purchased a ramp for a charity shop. One shop wanted to bring items out for me to see, I told them no, I wanted to go into the shop and browse like everyone else."

ACCESSIBLE ENTRANCE

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