

Session 1

Disabled People's Organisations; History & Culture

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Introduction

This chapter gives an introduction to Disabled People's Organisations, their history and culture. It is divided into two main sections:

1. Histories of disabled people and their organisations

And

2. Understanding disability.

The first covers the history of disabled people and their organisations. This includes both a distant and a more recent 'radical' history of disabled people, containing early representations and their politicization and gives a timeline of activity.

The second focuses on how disability is understood. It explores different ways of defining and representing disabled people, covering the medical, charity, administrative and social models. Topics associated with these, independent living and disability pride are then discussed.

The aim of this chapter is also to ensure that participants will have an understanding of disabled people's distant and recent history, and have explored some of the different ways disability is understood and represented.

Histories of Disabled People and their Organisations

Disabled people have been largely absent from history, but they have been around since the dawn of humankind. Where they have been mentioned it is often in a negative way.

In the Bible for example, Leviticus 21. 16-24, it is recorded that disabled people held the same status as prostitutes and were considered unclean.

Allan Sutherland's Chronology of Disability Arts 1977 / 2003 (2005) says that 'History is crucial to any culture, and it is essential to Disability. It is through a sense of history that we define who we are,

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what journey we have undertaken and how far we have come. We also, implicitly, map out the future'.

By looking at events of the past, we can explore how our knowledge of disability has been formed, and as a result what assumptions arise from that knowledge.

Early history

400 B.C 'Cripple' pension arranged by Lysias at the council of Athens.

865 A.D Legend says that the Danish Prince, Ivarr the Boneless, responsible for leading the Great Heathen invasion and subsequent occupation of England in 865, was a disabled man.

1100s Institutions for the quarantine of people with leprosy became prolific throughout Europe, these places became known as leprosariums.

Middle Ages

1388 The Statute of Cambridge ("Poor Law") distinguishes between the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor claiming alms.

1530s The dissolution of the monasteries creates large numbers of beggars, many of them disabled people who had previously been supported by the church. Poor Law Act of 1535.

1601 Elizabethan Poor Law explicitly defines 'deserving poor' as disabled people and children – this sets the tone for the next 300 years of 'state administration' of disabled peoples lives.

1750 The industrial Revolution in Britain brings urbanisation and the breakdown of the rural state and church welfare. The spread of poverty in cities leads to a growth in the number of institutions, asylums and workhouses to keep the 'economically unproductive' off the streets.

Radical History

1965 The formation of Disablement Income Group (DIG).

1969 The independent living movement begins in Berkeley, first Centre for Independent Living (CIL) for the community at large.

1972 Scotland established the first "union of mental patients" (SUMP).

1974 Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS) assert a social model of disability.

1981 Disabled People's International is formed.

1988 People First founded, by and for people with learning difficulties.

1991 Regard founded by and for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) disabled people.

1995 Disability Discrimination Act.

2007 United Nations (UN) convention on rights of disabled people.

If you'd like to find out more about disability history visit Disability Social History Project website:

http://www.disabilityhistory.org/timeline_new.html

Or look at Timeline of Disability History at Council of Disabled People Coventry & Warwickshire website:

<http://www.cdp.org.uk/timeline.htm>

Disabled People's Organisations

Disabled People's Organisations (DPOs) are set up, run and controlled by disabled people themselves and focus on human rights and equality for disabled people.

DPOs seek to redress a history of disempowerment of non-disabled people doing things 'for' disabled people, on their behalf, without their participation.

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DPOs are a lifeline and community source of liberation for disabled people and highly effective in promoting inclusion and delivering innovative and empowering activities and services.

Among many things, DPOs are involved in campaigning, influencing policy and social change, information, advice and support services, independent living, advocacy and arts.

DPOs face challenges to securing funding, costs of access, commissioning and tendering, skills shortages, governance and capacity building support.

Understanding Disability

Disability is not a straight forward thing to understand. There are a range of words associated with it and many ways of describing it. These will mean different things to different people. It covers a variety of issues, and is used to talk about bodies and minds, the way society discriminates, cultural and political issues and whether or not you are entitled to resources, like welfare benefits or protection under the law.

The Equality Act defines a disabled person as someone who has an impairment that has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.

The World Health Organisation sees disability as an umbrella term that includes impairments, activity limitations and participation restrictions and focuses on the interaction between features of a person's body / mind and those of the society where they live.

Previously, disability was understood solely as a tragic and medical issue. To challenge this activists and campaigners pushed forward alternative ways and models to understand disability.

The Medical Model, The Charity Model, The Administration Model



LAMED by your language
CRIPPLED by your charity
INVALIDATED by our doctors
VICTIMS of your systems
HANDICAPPED by society

The Medical Model, The Charity Model, The Administrative Model.
A model is a representation or way of showing what something is like or how it works. There are number of different models of disability and many ways to talk about it. The Medical Model = disability is your problem because your body and/or mind is broken and can be only treated by medicine.

The Charity Model = you are a poor little disabled person so we must raise money to improve facilities for you.

The Administrative Model = you are a number in the system, you must apply for help but we will decide what help you get.

'This image is taken from Ju Gosling's website Helping the Handicapped, commissioned by the City of Graz in 2003. To view the website, visit <http://sinnlos.st/help/index.html> or follow the link from Ju's Home Page at www.ju90.co.uk (Ju has a number of other disability related websites which you might also find helpful).'

The Social Model

The Social Model = you are disabled by society, your impairment is not the problem, society discriminates against you.

The social model makes a distinction between impairment = the diversity of your body/mind, and disability = discrimination by social barriers.

If the way society was organised was different, more inclusive and better at understanding disabled peoples lives we could take part as

citizens. It is the attitude, physical, organisational barriers that prevent us from working, learning, having a family and stop us living full lives.

Independent Living – What is it?

'Independent Living is a philosophy and a movement of disabled people who work for self-determination, equal opportunities and self-respect.

Independent Living does not mean that disabled people want to do everything by themselves and do not need anybody or that they want to live in isolation.

Independent Living means that they demand the same choices and control in their everyday lives that their non-disabled brothers and sisters, neighbours and friends take for granted.

They want to grow up in their families, go to the neighbourhood school, use the same bus as their neighbours and work in jobs that are in line with their education and interests, and start families of their own.

Since disabled people are the best experts on their needs, they need to show the solutions they want. They need to be in charge of their lives, think and speak for themselves – just the same as everybody else.

To this end we must support and learn from each other, organise ourselves and work for political changes that lead to the legal protection of our human and civil rights.

As long as we regard disabilities as tragedies, disabled people will be pitied.

As long as we feel ashamed of who we are, our lives will be regarded as useless.

As long as we remain silent, we will be told by others what to do.

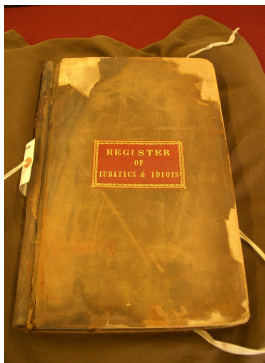
From Adolf Ratzka, 2003

Disability Pride

Disability Pride is about disabled people celebrating their lives and place in the world. Like other equality and cultural groups Disabled people often celebrate the pride event in public, showing off their diversity, being proud of who they are. Disability pride is a central part of the disabled people's movement and poses a direct challenge to systemic disablism and negative representations of disability.

Since 1992 the United Nations has promoted 3rd December as the International Day of Disabled Persons and often disability pride events will be organised to coincide with it. Typically, a disability pride event would include arts and culture activities, performed by disabled artists, performers and speeches by disabled activists.

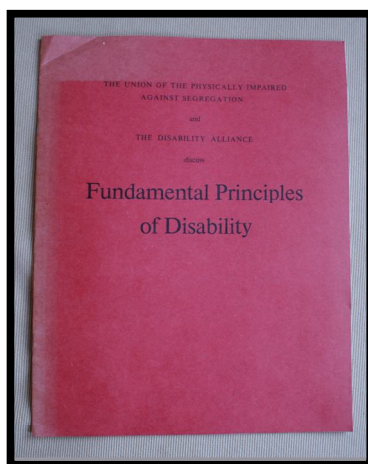
1870s Register of Lunatics & Idiots



The picture shows an old large book. This book was used in East London to record Names of people with learning difficulties and mental health issues. It shows how negatively disabled people have been seen in the past. It was not until 2006 that the words 'idiots and lunatics' were removed from the Electoral Administration Bill.

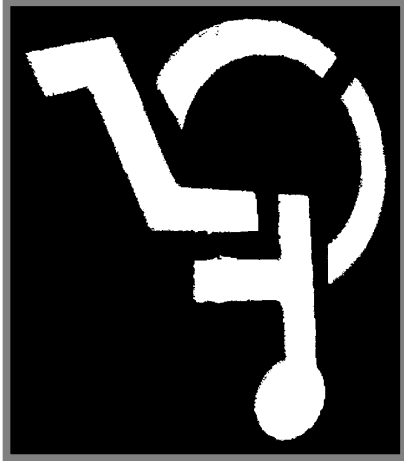
1970s Disability is Discrimination

This picture shows a little red book called the 'fundamental principles of disability'.



This records a discussion between some radical disabled people in 1974. It sets out the 'social model of disability'. This challenges negative views and claims disability as a human and civil rights issue. In the last 40 years this view has changed the way disability is seen and has had a significant influence on government policy. In the social model 'disability is redefined as the discrimination caused by an inaccessible society.

2070s What comes next?

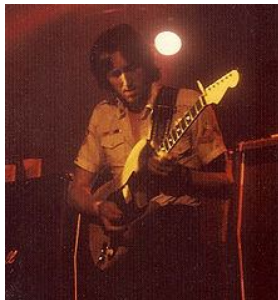


The adjacent picture shows an upside down wheelchair. What does the future hold for disabled people? Will the meaning of 'disability' change over time? What will this be like? Will disabled people be more or less included in society? How will this happen? What do we need to do to make sure having an impairment or health issues doesn't mean that you will face disability discrimination.

Disabled Legends



Baroness Jane Campbell - Member of House of Lords, co-chair All Party Parliamentary Group on Disability. With a long and incredibly impressive history of parliamentary campaigning, Baroness Jane Campbell of Surbiton DBE continues to be an inspiration to the disability sector



Alan Holdsworth – performer and disability activist (also known as Johnny Crescendo by his fans). He is a singer with a difference, his songs are not about love they're about disability rights.



Tanni Grey-Thompson – sportswoman and campaigner. Now retired but she remains one of the most successful sportswomen in history. Tanni recently became a life peer in the House of Lords.

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Stephen Hawking – Professor Hawking has twelve honorary degrees. He was awarded the CBE in 1982, and was made a Companion of Honor in 1989. He is the recipient of many awards, medals and prizes, is a Fellow of The Royal Society and Member of the UK National Academy of Sciences.



Sir Douglas Bader - Honored in 1976 with a knighthood for his contribution and work on behalf of disabled people, a charitable foundation has since been set up in his name.



Rt Hon Lord Jack Ashley of Stoke – Labour member of Parliament and Labour peer, he was awarded a lifetime achievement award in recognition of his work for the deaf community.



Ian Dury – Singer, songwriter and actor.



Sir Thomas William Shakespeare, 3rd Baronet, better known as Tom Shakespeare, is a geneticist and sociologist.



Helen Keller - was an American author, political activist, and lecturer.



Stevie Wonder – Singer is an American singer-songwriter, multi-instrumentalist, record producer and activist.