

DEMYSTIFYING THE SOCIAL MODEL OF DISABILITY

REDEFINING 'THE PROBLEM'

Throughout history disabled people have been the subject of professional enquiry. While it has tended to be the medical and related professions that have controlled for many years, the way disability has been viewed by society at large, disabled people themselves have always articulated a different view of disability that has been based on personal experience of living with an impairment or condition and being part of the community, or not, as was so often the case with the dominance of the 19th and 20th Century institutions.

The last 30 to 40 years has seen a significant change in the way disabled people are viewed and a greater understanding has led to wider opportunities for disabled people to take a more active role in society. It is disabled people themselves that have driven this change through the Disabled Peoples' movement for civil rights.

Underpinning this movement is the concept of the 'Social Model' of disability. Disabled people used their personal experience of disability and institutional life to show that it wasn't their impairments which caused the 'problem,' but the way in which society failed to accommodate differences. It describes disability as the result of any behaviour or barriers which prevent people with impairments choosing to take part in the life of society.

The social model does not wish to deny the existence of impairments and physiological differences - far from it; rather it addresses them as a natural characteristic of human difference. This social approach places emphasis on those aspects of our world that can be changed.

Therefore, using the social model as a policy approach to the Disability Equality Duty will help you implement the Scheme far more effectively and successfully.

Good Practice example:

Leicestershire County and Leicester City Council's collaborated in partnership with the Leicestershire Coalition of Disabled people on how to promote the social model in local service delivery and employment. Listening to the mood and demands of local disabled People the Council's supported the start up of Leicestershire Centre for Integrated Living an agency managed and run by disabled people.

On this foundation LCIL has gone on to establish a reputation locally, and across other sectors for best practice disability equality and excellent service and employment delivery that enshrines the social model of disability approach.

In very practical terms the social model enables us to focus on solutions by removing the economic, cultural and environmental barriers that prevent or limit disabled peoples participation as active citizens. For example rather than a focus upon a persons learning disability the production of easy-to-read formats gives access to information or; making

adjustments to the way a job task is done such as provision of assistive technology enables a disabled person to perform in their job.

The success of this model and its pragmatic approach to equality is now acknowledged and to varying degrees implemented by Government bodies and public agencies.