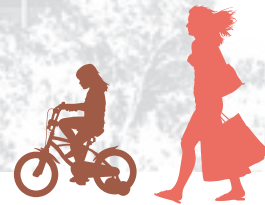




The social model of disability

Achieving access for all





The social model of disability.

(Written by the late Jeanette Wallace, Chair of Croydon Disability Forum and Disabled People's Champion – Croydon Council).

Understanding the social model of disability enables service providers and those working in the public sector to identify barriers.

The social model has been created and endorsed by disabled people internationally and is widely accepted. This model signifies a shift away from the traditional models as it recognises that disabled people are not disabled because of their impairment, but by the structures or barriers present in society.

There are two different accepted models for defining the causes of disadvantage:

- an individual (or medical) model, and
- a social model.

The medical model encourages explanations in terms of the features of an individual's body, whereas the social model of disability encourages explanations in terms of the characteristics of social organisation.

The medical model.

Under the medical model, disabled peoples' inability to participate in society is seen as a direct result of having an impairment, and not as a result of features of our society which can be changed. When people, such as policy makers or those providing services think about disability in this individual way, they tend to concentrate their efforts on "compensating" people with impairments for what is wrong with their bodies.

The experiences of disabled people have shown that in reality most problems are not caused by their impairments, but by the way society is organised. This is not to deny that individual disabled people meet different barriers from one another within society, but these often have collective themes. It is these collective themes that inform the social model.

