



Active, Connected, Included

How people with learning disabilities become more included in community life

Guidance, questions and tips for people who run community groups



Introduction

People with learning disabilities have the right to live fulfilling lives and to be included in their communities. People with learning disabilities may need a little more support and encouragement to be able to take part in activities in their communities, but that shouldn't stop them! Use this guide to think about changes you can make to what you do to help make the experience of being involved easier for someone with a learning disability.

This guide is in **four parts**:

- This part is for people who organise activities and groups in the community.
- One part is for the people who support a person with a learning disability in either a paid or unpaid capacity. This could be family members or paid support workers for example.
- One part tells people with learning disabilities about their rights and is written in an Easy Read format.
- One part explains the thinking and ideas behind what we have done.

In this guide we will talk about the law but involving people is not just about compliance with the law. Excluding people means missing out on the good things they have to bring.

Who are people with learning disabilities?

A learning disability is significant and lifelong. It starts before adulthood and affects the person's development. This means that a person with a learning disability will be likely to need help to understand information, learn skills and live a fulfilling life. Some people with learning disabilities will also have healthcare needs and require support to communicate.

Scotland's Census, 2011, reported 26,349 people to have learning disabilities, which is 0.5% of Scotland's population. Statistics show that people with learning disabilities do not yet enjoy the same life chances as others.

About this document

We have posed some questions for you to think about how your group works just now.

The discussion following the questions will help you to think about changes you can make to better meet the needs of people with learning disabilities who may wish to attend your group.

About the law

The law requires changes to be made to accommodate people's needs; these are called reasonable adjustments.

Reasonable adjustments are just that, reasonable. They should be manageable, affordable and do not mean that others in the group are treated less favourably. The law does not allow refusal of people because of their protected characteristics. These are:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Pregnancy, maternity and breastfeeding
- Race
- Religion or belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation

It is ok for a group to be specifically for people with one of these characteristics e.g. a youth group, but it is not ok to exclude a person from that group because they also have another of the characteristics. For example a young person who is gay cannot be excluded from the youth group because they are gay but an older person may be excluded because they do not fit the age requirement.

You can find out more about the law regarding this at:

<https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/advice-and-guidance/what-equality-law-means-your-membership-association>

Question 1. Are people with learning disabilities eligible to join your group?

Yes No Not Sure

If you have answered no to this, it may be for a variety of reasons. Maybe you just have not considered the possibility that people with learning disabilities may be potential participants. Your group might be for people who all have something in common such as an age range, a physical or mental health condition, living in the same geographical boundaries or sharing a common interest or religion. You may not have considered people with learning disabilities.

People with learning disabilities are not just people with learning disabilities; they can also be singers, dancers, footballers, artists, writers or gardeners. They can be young people, old people, gay people, religious people etc. Whatever the focus of your group there is likely to be someone with a learning disability who is eligible to join in.

Think about the membership of your group....

**Are there people with learning disabilities in your club, group or society?
If there is not, can you think of a reason why?**

This video introduces the latest implementation plan for Scotland's learning disability strategy *The keys to life*

<https://vimeo.com/321722279>



**The keys
to life**

Question 2. Are people with learning disabilities represented proportionately in the group?

Yes No Not Sure

Who is not there may be as important as who is there. If your group would welcome people with learning disabilities and none attend, you need to identify if there is a reason for this.

Think about subliminal messaging....

It may be necessary to expressly say that people with learning disabilities are welcome. People who are used to a world where their support, activities and friendship groups come badged as being for people with learning disabilities might not see themselves as being welcome to go to things that are 'for everybody'.

Including a phrase like 'supporters welcome' or 'free for supporters' sends a message that people who need support to attend are expressly welcomed. In some groups people with learning disabilities are required to pay for their supporters to attend as well as pay for themselves. This can prevent them from taking part in activities with a cost attached; if you can remove this charge it would help them.



Question 3. Do you feel that your group has what it takes to include people with learning disabilities?

Yes No Not Sure

Group members might be concerned that they don't have the skills or training they need to include people with learning disabilities. It's true that some people with learning disabilities may also have health conditions such as epilepsy that they need medical support for but if a person has these sort of medical needs they are likely to have someone who is trained to administer any medication they require with them. Otherwise, no particular training should be required to include a person with a learning disability in your group. You may need to be patient and to listen carefully to allow the person to communicate with you.



Think about who your group already knows....

Someone in your group may already know a person with a learning disability; this might help to ease anxiety that others have. You could ask this person to 'buddy up' for a few sessions with the person with a learning disability. They could offer reassurance to others in the group who have any anxiety about how they should engage with the new person.

If you are approached by a person with a learning disability who wants to join your group and you think this may pose a challenge, it might be possible to have them bring along a friend, family member or supporter the first few times they come to the group if this will help to ensure that other members of the group feel more confident.

Question 4. Is the way we let people know about the group widely accessible?

Yes No Not Sure

Remember that people with learning disabilities may struggle with leaflets and posters that rely too heavily on text. Keep information clear and simple. It is important that information is in a variety of places, including places that people with learning disabilities already go. Word of mouth can be a really good way to let people know about what your group offers and tends to be a common way for people to hear about local activities and events.

But remember that people with learning disabilities might be supported by workers who are not from the local area and therefore will not be connected to people in the local area. These workers will often be a source of information for people with learning disabilities. Therefore, consider ways you can let people know about your activities. Consider reaching out to local support organisations or shared living environments in your community.



- **Make sure the information about what you do is clear.**
- **Make sure that you put information in a range of places including places where people with learning disabilities already go.**
- **Make sure your communications are clear about what actually happens at the group.**
- **Is the name of your group self-explanatory? 'Tea Dance Tuesday' is clearer than 'Tuesday Club'.**
- **Be clear about when and where your activity happens and how to get there.**
- **Try to think about if local people have a common name for a building or place that might be different from the official name as some people may know it by one not the other.**

For example, The Clyde Auditorium in Glasgow is colloquially known as 'the Armadillo'; similarly the Lawnmarket in Edinburgh would be less familiar as a street name to a lot of people than 'The Royal Mile'.

Question 5. Is there anything that might stop a person from participating in the activity?

Yes No Not Sure



- Is the venue easy to get to?
- Can people just turn up?
- Is it easy for someone with poor mobility to get around in the building?
- Is it easy to find the group when you get inside the building?
- Is there a cost to your activity? Remember that people with learning disabilities may not have the means to pay up front for a whole term.
- Is the payment process a problem? Some methods of payment can also be difficult e.g. bank transfers.
- Do you need people to fill in forms? For example, membership applications.

Tips for inclusion

It can be very difficult to be a new person joining an established group. It is even more difficult for someone who sees themselves as 'different' for example in the case of a person with a learning disability.

- 1. Think about what it's like when someone new first arrives. Can you designate someone each week to meet and greet?**
- 2. Maybe consider a 'buddy system' for new people for their first few sessions.**
- 3. Ensure payment methods are accessible.**
- 4. Communicate clearly: what the activity is, where and when it takes place.**
- 5. Avoid unnecessary paperwork.**
- 6. If you see someone struggling with forms, for example, then help them out.**

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