

Disability Guidance for RIBI Clubs and Districts

Disability is an Equality and Diversity issue. As Rotarians we need to give this full and proper consideration in order not only that we comply with the law, but also our obligations as Rotarians

Think about the Four-Way Test -

Is it the TRUTH?

Is it FAIR to all concerned? If we fail to meet the needs of disabled people, it cannot be fair.

Will it build GOODWILL and BETTER FRIENDSHIPS? Meeting the needs of disabled people and welcoming them to Rotary Clubs and events will generate goodwill and better friendships and the reverse equally applies.

Will it be BENEFICIAL to all concerned? Do it right and it will be.

Many of the Objects of Rotary can be equally linked.

The key issues with meeting the needs of disabled people within Rotary include –

- Physical access
- Communication
- Attitude

The people we need to think about include –

- Existing members
- Potential members
- Others that may come in to contact with us

Looking at these points in a little more detail –

Physical access

There are many people with impaired mobility and only a tiny proportion of these are wheelchair users. Some were born with a disability, some have acquired a disability, and many are impaired by the effects of ageing. One of the biggest problems they face in daily life are the barriers we construct or fail to remove. The most common barriers are –

- Lack of suitable parking within the distance that person can manage.
- Lack of a step free route externally or internally. This is vital for a wheelchair user or someone who cannot manage steps. It is generally unsafe to lift or carry someone, other than in an emergency, and a risk assessment is essential before doing so.
- Steps or stairs without handrails in a suitable place. Those who can cope with steps and stairs often need a solid handrail to assist them.

- Poor surfaces such as loose gravel or uneven grass. Manual wheelchair users and some ambulant disabled people find loose gravel difficult or impossible to negotiate.
- Lack of accessible toilet facilities. Wheelchair users need space. Many disabled people need grab rails. Visually impaired people like good lighting levels and good colour contrasts (e.g. dark coloured toilet seats to offset against the sea of white).
- Space within rooms. It can be difficult to manoeuvre a wheelchair, scooter, or other mobility aid in tightly packed rooms. If someone is accompanied by an assistance dog space is needed for the dog.
- Difficult to see steps and trip hazards are a real problem for people with poor eyesight. Good colour contrasts are vital. Grey on grey just does not work.

Communication

The most common impairment in the population is hearing loss. The provision of good amplification systems in all but the smallest rooms can make a massive difference. These should be accompanied by a hearing induction loop (or equivalent) so that hearing aid users can obtain a direct feed to their aids. Good microphones (preferably cordless and including lapel and headset models) and ensuring speakers know how to use them is vital. Never ever allow the speaker to get away with “I don’t need the mike, I have a loud voice”. In a debate or question session ensure all speakers use microphones.

Visual impairment can range from some loss of peripheral vision to total blindness. Be prepared to provide what assistance the person needs. Ask them what is required. Remember that they may be unable to see your wonderful PowerPoint slides and you will need to adjust your presentation accordingly. Check how they want communications presented. They may be happy with emails provided there is no reliance on images. They may want printed matter in large print.

Attitude

Never take the view that a disabled person would not be able or want to do something. Ask them for their opinion.

Approach meeting the needs of disabled people in a positive way.

Remember that assistance dogs are allowed almost everywhere and the normal bans on dogs do not apply. There are a few exceptions such as some zoos and animal parks, where alternative provision is made. Always ask the disabled person before approaching the dog. Food is rarely required, but water is usually welcome. During longer events the offer of assistance to walk the dog or take it outside for calls of nature may be appreciated.

Existing members

Are you meeting the needs of existing members properly? Have any members developed disabilities that you have overlooked? Are one or two members struggling to hear the speakers? Is a member suffering from memory loss? Can someone no longer read the notices passed round at the meeting?

If so you may find them unwilling to tell you. They may just start attending less often or become less involved or even resign. Try to identify the needs before they become an issue and meet them head on. There are lots of ways we can help –

- Offer a lift to meetings.
- Change their role to one that can be done despite memory loss.
- Sort out the audio equipment and induction loop.
- Change the meeting venue to one with good access.

Potential members

If someone has a disability they may not even consider joining Rotary. Make clear the welcome and access you have on your website and publicity. Take positive steps to encourage disabled people to come along as potential members. After all, would you really want to discourage Dr Stephen Hawking, Baroness (Tanni) Grey-Thompson, Sir Bert Massie, Simon Weston, Frank Gardner, Peter White, or Evelyn Glennie from joining your Club, yet all of them have substantial disabilities.

Others that may come in to contact with us

This group includes visitors to a Club, such as speakers and visiting Rotarians. It does, however, also include all the people we come in to contact with through the Rotary year. There are people who attend our events as guests or as ticket holders or as spectators. People that we shake tins at. People we organise outings for or help in other ways. Potential Rotary Scholars and Group Study Exchange participants.