

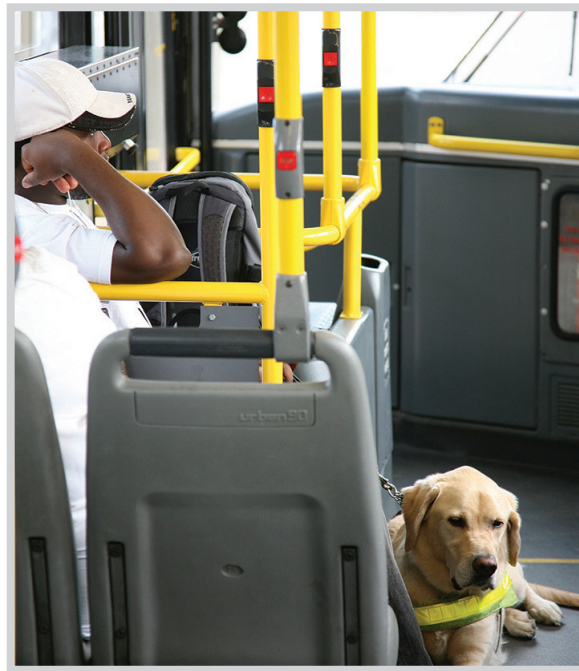
# Disabled adults and social workers

## Position statement



*Disabled woman and friend enjoy cup of tea.*

**British Association of Social Workers and Shaping our Lives**



*Man with visual impairment travels on bus.*

***“We need to think big and be ambitious for each other.”  
(Working Group, 29 October 2015)***

This position statement was produced by BASW England (British Association of Social Workers) and Shaping Our Lives. It was written through discussions between disabled adults and social workers from June 2015 to November 2016. Some of these discussions happened when we met together and some of them happened virtually. All of them were about how we can change the way we, as disabled adults and social workers, relate to each other so that we can achieve more together.

We started with a blank piece of paper and we ended up with this position statement. We want it be meaningful and useful to disabled adults and social workers. We want it to make a positive difference to people’s experiences and to what happens to them. We hope that you will find it helpful.

**Shaping Our Lives  
Board**

**British Association of Social Workers  
England Committee**



# Background

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**This position statement was developed by disabled adults and social workers working together as equal partners. It states how we can take action together to:**

- Tackle physical, social, economic and other barriers to independent living, so that all disabled adults have the same choice, control and freedom as any other citizen – at home, at work, and as members of the community
- Help disabled adults and social workers work better together to achieve the outcomes people want.

We worked together using the following principles:

- **Co-production** – the statement has been jointly developed and agreed
- **Respect** – the purpose of the statement is to improve how disabled adults and social workers work together; everyone's views and expertise has been used and valued
- **Impact** – the aim is not just to produce a statement, but to take action that will make a difference to people's lives and wellbeing.

This statement was produced by disabled adults and social workers in England. It may also be useful to people in other countries of the United Kingdom and beyond.



*Disabled woman talks with colleague at work.*

# Definitions

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**Disabled:** In this statement *disabled adults* is used in its broadest sense to include all adults who identify as disabled, including with physical and sensory impairments, those living with long term conditions or illness, people with learning disabilities and those living with mental health issues. We recognise that people do not necessarily identify as disabled.

**Adults:** This statement was co-produced by social workers and disabled people between the ages of 18 and retirement age. The principles are likely to apply to younger and older people as well. A next step would be to work with these groups to create a similar statement for them. The statement does not specifically address how social workers and carers work together. Better social work with disabled adults is likely to support carers indirectly, and some disabled adults will also be carers.

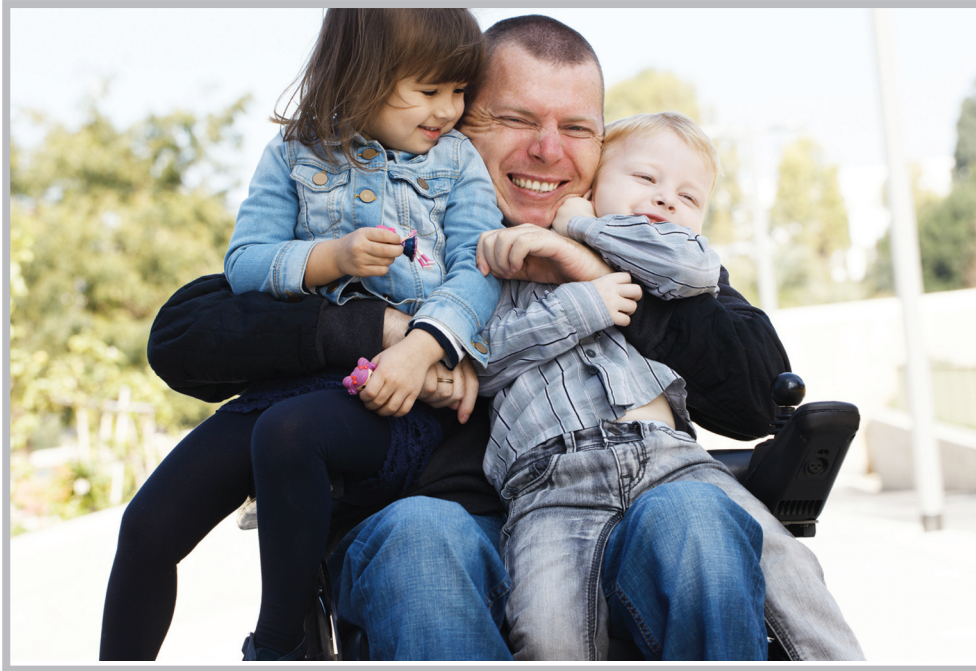
**Social worker:** “Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledge, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing.”<sup>1</sup>

**Co-production:** “Co-production is not just a word, it’s not just a concept, it is a meeting of minds coming together to find a shared solution. In practice, it involves people who use services being consulted, included and working together from the start to the end of any project that affects them on equal terms to support their empowerment.”<sup>2</sup>

**Others:** We talk about the importance of sharing this statement with others and influencing others. By *others* we mean anyone who can make a positive contribution to our goal of ensuring equal and full citizenship for all disabled adults.

# Position Statement

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*Disabled man hugs children.*

## **Why disabled adults and social workers need to work well together**

We share common values, and a common purpose and approach, to achieve the best outcomes for disabled people through:

- Disabled people's activism
- Social work ethics and capabilities
- A history of joint work.

*(See evidence in Appendix 2, 1.1)*

## **We can make better progress together**

- There are benefits from pooling our knowledge, experience and expertise
- The Care Act 2014<sup>3</sup> is an opportunity to work together to secure the statutory entitlements and elements of wellbeing, control and choice it promises
- We need to work together to achieve change in other key agencies and services, especially health, housing, employment and benefits.

*(See evidence in Appendix 2, 1.2)*

## **We don't work well enough together yet**

- Many disabled adults still have poor experiences and outcomes
- Disabled adults face extensive barriers
- Social workers experience conflict between being an advocate, an advisor, a risk-assessor and a gatekeeper
- Social work practice is not consistently excellent.

*(See evidence in Appendix 2, 1.3)*

## **We are in a difficult context**

- A changing population and cuts across all public services have led to increased need for support and reduced support being available
- Social work and social care need to work effectively with other services, particularly health services
- Disabled adults are not always effectively involved in service planning and review
- Disabled adults do not always have choice of and control over social care provision and other aspects of independent living
- Society does not always view disabled adults as equal citizens
- Disabled adults experience negative attitudes, discrimination, oppression, hostility and abuse
- Inflexible social work processes impact on disabled adults – targets, paperwork, workload, lack of professional autonomy, lack of continuity, short-term input.

*(See evidence in Appendix 2, 1.4)*

We need to continue to strive for a more effective voice for disabled adults and for social workers. We need to work together to change the context.

## **What we are aiming for**

All disabled adults and social workers work together to improve wellbeing, using the social model of disability to overcome barriers, and using a human rights approach to ensure equal and full citizenship for everyone.

*(See evidence in Appendix 2, 2)*

## **What we believe will help us**

- Shared goals – co-producing solutions in partnership
- Striving for better relationships, and working in a way that promotes trust and respect
- Clarity about what good looks like
- Clear expectations
- Better ways of working together.

*(See evidence in Appendix 2, 3)*

## **How we intend to achieve this**

Shared goals – co-producing solutions in partnership

- Using the social model of disability, whilst recognising that not everyone identifies as a disabled person
- Taking a rights-based approach – based on the United Nations convention on the rights of persons with disabilities, the Equality Act and the Care Act 2014
- Applying both the principles of Independent Living and the wellbeing provisions of the Care Act.

Striving for better relationships, and working in a way that promotes trust and respect

- Acknowledgement of shared humanity and experience
- Mutual understanding of each other's situation
- Recognition of each others' knowledge, judgment, skills and capabilities
- Not making assumptions.

Clarity about what good looks like, and what people should expect

- We have developed a charter to go with this position statement
- We will continue to co-produce resources that support disabled adults and social workers to work better together.

Better ways of working together

- We will use the charter as an agreement for how we will work together
- We will share the charter with others
- We will work together to influence others
- We will work jointly on resources that support disabled adults and social workers to work better together
- We will work together to challenge policies that undermine disabled people's rights and make it more difficult for them to achieve positive outcomes
- The professional body for social work, the British Association of Social Workers (BASW), will continue to work alongside disabled people to ensure full citizenship.

## **Actions that people can take**

- Use the social model of disability and human rights approach (see *Appendix 1*).
- Use the charter to lobby for change and improvement at national and local level.
- Get involved in developing, sharing and using resources that support disabled adults and social workers to work better together.
- Get involved in BASW's work to make sure it is informed by disabled people's experience and expertise, and by social work practice.
- Get involved in joint action to improve disabled people's rights and outcomes.