Shaping Our Lives
A Refuge for All Best Practice Toolkit

- A practical tool to help make your services accessible for disabled women

A Refuge for All is a project funded by the DCMS Tampon Tax Fund to improve access to violence and abuse services for disabled women

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1. How to use this Toolkit

This best practice toolkit has been developed to help services become more accessible and inclusive for disabled women who are seeking support because they are experiencing (or have experienced) violence and abuse. It is recommended that you read the Shaping Our Lives A Refuge for All Project and Findings report before using this toolkit (https://www.shapingourlives.org.uk/resources/our-resources/shaping-our-lives-a-refuge-for-all-project-and-findings-report).

Shaping Our Lives has developed this toolkit as part of the A Refuge for All project. A Refuge for All has been funded by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) Tampon Tax Fund to improve access to violence and abuse services for disabled women. The project has been led by an advisory group of disabled women who have lived experience of violence and abuse alongside a project team who have expertise in the inclusive involvement of disabled people. Although this toolkit is designed to develop best practice in the inclusion of disabled women, it will also help to make your services accessible to disabled men and people from other diverse and marginalized communities.

There are three sections to this toolkit: a number of self-assessment templates, an action plan and a collection of resources and guides. You should work through the toolkit in the order it is presented. A short description of each section can be found below.

- Self-Assessment Templates

These templates ask questions about all aspects of your service and ask you to score your performance against equality and diversity criteria. Please see section 2 of this toolkit for details of how to score your performance. You should complete all self-assessment templates before moving onto the action plan.

- Action Plan

Any equality and diversity criteria (questions on the templates) where you have scored less than 4 should be added to your action plan. The action plan should be completed by adding what action you intend to take, in what timescale and who will be responsible for this. Please see section 2 for recommended timescales for actions. The action plan provides you with a monitoring tool that should be regularly reviewed in line with your service management processes.

- Shaping Our Lives Resources

Section 5 provides some resources that will help you to improve your scoring, and also to show that your service is committed to providing accessible services to disabled women as far as is practically possible. We recognise that sometimes there will be physical barriers to accessing buildings that can only be changed by considerable financial investment and this may not be feasible. However, we would stress that you consider the definition of a disabled person (section 6) and ensure that all aspects are made as accessible as possible to as many disabled women as possible. There is information about how to work with disabled women and some inexpensive adaptations. When you have completed your action plan, you may then want to use the equality and diversity commitment and the poster that is relevant to disabled women seeking support.

Finally, we have provided the definition of a disabled person as described in the Equality Act 2010 and we recommend that you ensure all staff are familiar with this and have read the Equality Act 2010 Service Providers guide (https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/85011/disability.pdf).

2. Scoring

Scoring each item in the templates will be helpful when completing your action plan and making improvements. By scoring these self-assessment templates you will create a service monitoring tool that will help you to assess how well you are meeting the legal requirements of the Equality Act 2010 and gives you information that can be used in commissioning processes. Section 6 has a link to a guide describing service providers' responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010.

The scoring method is as follows:
- 4 = Yes, we do this – no action required
- 3 = Partly do this – some improvement required
- 2 = Rarely do this – a lot of improvement required
- 1 = No, we don't do this – a lot of poor practice, and/or actual evidence of discriminatory practice

Evaluating your result

When you have completed each self-assessment template, total your score using the values above, for example, you score 4 if you answer 'Yes' to a criteria indicating that your organisation is following best practice in this area. The target score is indicated on each template and when your service attains this target it indicates that you are working in an inclusive and accessible way for disabled women. We strongly recommend that you contact your local Deaf and Disabled People's Organisation (DDPO) and/or Shaping Our Lives for advice if you are not achieving the target score for each self-assessment.

All actions should have a timescale so they can be planned along with other service commitments. Suggested timescales:

- Short term - within one month
  This may be an action that can be easily done and/or an action that needs to be done quickly because it is discriminatory or excluding disabled women from using a service.
- Medium term - within 6 months
  This is an action that needs longer to implement but is still a service priority as it may exclude disabled women from using the service.
- Long term - 1 year
  These are actions that need considerable planning such as training for staff or changes to a property to make it more accessible.

3. Self-assessment templates

3.1 Administration and processes

Use these self-assessment templates to evaluate how accessible your service administration and processes are for disabled women. Remember to complete your action plan with short, medium and long term changes and improvements.

3.1.1 Asking the right questions

Criteria	Self-assessment score	Action required	Timescale
Do all staff know what the legal definition of a disabled person is? (found in the Equality Act 2010)			
Do you ask if someone has an impairment or long term health condition?			
Do you ask what would make it easier for someone to access your services?			
Do you ask and record any communication access needs people have?			

Do you ask and record any physical access needs people have?			
Is this information recorded and referred to each time that person is contacted?			
Your score			
Target score	**24**		

3.1.2 Contact and appointments

Criteria	Self-assessment score	Action required	Timescale
If someone cannot use a telephone to contact your service is there an alternative?			
Do you have a textphone that staff know how to use?			
Can you offer flexibility about the time of appointments?			
Can you offer telephone appointments for those unable to leave their home?			
Your score			
Target score	**16**		

3.1.3 Networks for support

Criteria	Self-assessment score	Action required	Timescale
Have you identified staff with particular disability skills and knowledge that can be used when needed?			
Are you connected with your local DDPO* for advice and information sharing?			
Have you connected with Adult services in your local authority for equipment loans etc.?			
Have you connected with the local Fire Service who can provide safety equipment for people with hearing impairments and general fire safety support?			
Your score			
Target score	**16**		

*DDPO – Deaf and Disabled People's Organisation

3.2 Providing accessible information and communications

Use this self-assessment template to evaluate how accessible your information and communications are for disabled women. Remember to complete your action plan with short, medium and long term changes and improvements.

3.2.1 Commitment to diversity and inclusion

Criteria	Self-assessment score	Action required	Timescale
Do you have a diversity statement that is prominently displayed?			
Do you have a diversity and inclusion service standard commitment? (see example in this toolkit)			
Do you have frequently asked questions to help people understand?			
Do you have a prominent statement offering accessible formats? (where relevant)			

Do you offer assistance to complete forms and documentation?			
Your score			
Target score	**20**		

3.2.2 Accessible language

It is important that staff know what language to use when working with disabled women. Inappropriate language can be disabling and a barrier to people using a service.

Criteria	Self-assessment score	Action required	Timescale
Is your marketing and website written in plain English?			
Are you using the appropriate language to describe disabled people?			
Your score			
Target score	**8**		

3.2.3 Accessible website

Criteria	Self-assessment score	Action required	Timescale
Is your website accessible with a screen reader?			
Does your website have clear and logical navigation?			
Are website links clearly described?			
Do headings clearly describe the content?			
Is text in short and concise paragraphs?			
Are images described with a caption and are they Alt Texted*?			
Are images inclusive of diverse communities?			

Does your electronic media have moving images? (Moving images are very difficult for some people to see and we recommend static images)			
Your score			
Target score	**32**		

* Alt text is embedded words that describe an image so anyone reading with a screen reader who cannot see the image will hear a description.

3.2.4 Accessible formats

Criteria	Self-assessment score	Action required	Timescale
Do you use a clear non-serif font for all materials e.g. Arial?			
Do you use a minimum of 12 point and ideally 14 point for all text?			
Is there clear contrast between text and background on all materials?			

Are there clear headings and navigation aids such as page numbering and contents index?			
Do you avoid using block capitals, italics and underlining?			
Are all materials available in plain text? (Plain text documents can be easily changed to larger print sizes or sent as an electronic attachment)*			
Can all documents available on your website be downloaded and printed?			
Have you got a prominent statement and process for producing information in alternative formats such as Braille?			
Your score			
Target score	**32**		

* Some people will not be able to read a PDF document if they are using access technology. Making a Word version available is good practice.

3.3 Barriers to accessing your service

Use this self-assessment template to evaluate how accessible your premises are to disabled women and the actions you have taken to overcome possible physical barriers. Remember to complete your action plan with short, medium and long term changes and improvements.

3.3.1 Accessing buildings

Criteria	Self-assessment score	Action required	Timescale
Can you provide directions using different types of transport and in an accessible format?			
Can you provide information about the nearest blue badge parking spaces?			
Do you have information regarding the physical surroundings of your building – are there dropped kerbs, is there a slope to get to the door?			
Do you have a portable ramp for people who cannot manage steps?			

Are entrance mechanisms such as an intercom at an accessible height for a wheelchair user or person with restricted height?			
If there is an intercom, do you have an agreed procedure for alternative access for those who cannot use an intercom (for example someone with a hearing or communication impairment)?			
Do you have pictures and measurements of any entrance barriers such as a step or narrow door? (It is recommended that you provide as much information about physical barriers as possible so people can make their own decision, however, ensure that buildings cannot be identified)			
Can you provide a floor plan of service buildings to help people orientate?			
Are all corridors and rooms clear of clutter?			

Do you have an accessible toilet?			
Is the accessible toilet checked regularly to ensure it is working and stocked with paper and towels (if relevant)?			
Are you using the latest accessible toilet sign that indicate that some people have hidden disabilities?			
If you have several floors, is there an accessible lift?			
Is there an access procedure if the lift is not working?			
Is there a personal fire evacuation plan process?			
Can you offer a choice of chairs e.g. high back, office swivel chair, chair that can be reclined or can be laid flat (some people may find some chairs better than others)?*			

Is there an option to provide different lighting if needed?			
Do staff tell people in advance if there is a long walk to get to a room within a building?			
Is there a quiet space available?			
Have you implemented the list of cheap adjustments? (included in this guide)			
Your score			
Target score	80		

* Disabled women may need particular style chairs to sit comfortably and/or to be able to move from a wheelchair into a chair (described as transferring). If you look around your service premises, there are likely to be several different styles of chair and it is best practice to know where they are if needed. If you do not have a high-backed chair and a chair without arms, it may be a good idea to get one of each.

We recommend you commission a full disability access audit of your premises.

Your local Deaf and Disabled People's Organisation (DDPO) should be able to give you information and advice, and you can also contact the National Register of Access Consultants (NRAC) – an independent register of accredited Access Auditors and Access Consultants who meet professional standards and criteria established by a peer review system. It is a UK-wide accreditation service for individuals who undertake access auditing and access consultancy. Find out more at www.nrac.org.uk

3.4 Staff confidence - knowledge and training

Use this self-assessment template to evaluate disability equality knowledge and confidence among your staff team. Remember to complete your action plan with short, medium and long term changes and improvements.

Criteria	Self-assessment score	Action required	Timescale
Do all staff know what the legal definition of a disabled person is? (found in the Equality Act 2010)			
Are staff confident talking about disability?			
Are staff confident talking about access needs?			
Are staff confident about offering assistance?			
Are staff confident about meeting access needs? (see training needs survey in section 4.6)			
Have all staff had disability equality training in the last 4 years?			
Can staff apply the social model of disability in their work?			

Do staff understand what a reasonable adjustment is and how to provide it?			
Do staff know how to assist a wheelchair user or person with a mobility impairment?			
Do staff know how to work effectively with d/Deaf people, including British Sign Language (BSL) interpreters?			
Do staff know how to guide and properly support a visually impaired person?			
Do staff know how to use plain English?			
Are staff confident about working with people who have cognitive or neurodivergent conditions?			
Are staff confident about working with people with speech or communication impairments?			
Are staff confident about working with people with energy impairments?			

Do staff understand how chronic illness might affect someone and are they confident to discuss this?			
Are staff confident working with people with mental health issues?			
Is there a process to support staff to take a personalised approach and record information about an individual's specific requirements?			
Can staff work with disabled women equally to improve services? (known as co-production)			
Are staff aware of how to appropriately involve personal assistants, carers and other support staff?			
Your score			
Target score	**80**		

We would always recommend ensuring staff and volunteers receive Disability Equality Training (DET). For best results, this training should be delivered by disabled people. Shaping Our Lives can provide training or your local Deaf and Disabled People's Organisation (DDPO) should be able to either provide DET or put you in touch with trainers who can.

3.5 Staff training needs analysis

Below is a survey that assesses how 'disability confident' staff and volunteers are about working with disabled women. We recommend that the survey is created on an electronic survey system such as Survey Monkey and respondents can answer the questions anonymously. This type of electronic survey system will also summarise the results.

Once your staff and volunteers have completed the survey, please complete your self-assessment below and add to your action list if appropriate.

Criteria	Self-assessment score	Action required	Timescale
Staff and volunteers are confident working with disabled women			
Your score			
Target score	**4**		

Training Needs Analysis survey

Your answers are confidential and anonymous, so please let us know as openly and as honestly as possible what you understand about working with disabled people.

There are 16 questions and it will take about 10 minutes to complete.

a) Have you ever done disability equality training?

   Yes / No (please delete as appropriate)

   - If yes, can you tell us what the training covered?

   - If yes, when was this?

b) Do you know why disabled women are twice as likely to experience violence and abuse?

   Yes / No / A little

c) How much do you know about the rights disabled people have under the Equalities Act 2010?

   A lot / A little / Not at all

d) Do you understand the difference between 'disabled, impairment and health conditions'?

   Yes / No / A little

e) Are you confident in talking about disabled people?

Very / Not very / Not at all

f) Are you confident about making reasonable adjustments in a non-discriminatory way?

Very / Not very / Not at all

g) Are you confident about asking a disabled person what their access needs are?

Very / Not very / Not at all

h) Are you confident about making buildings and services accessible for:

- People with a mobility impairment such as someone who uses a wheelchair?

Very / Not very / Not at all

- Someone who is blind or partially sighted?

Very / Not very / Not at all

- A Deaf person or someone with hearing loss?

Very / Not very / Not at all

- Someone with a cognitive impairment such as memory loss?

Very / Not very / Not at all

- Someone who has difficulty speaking or making themselves understood?

  Very / Not very / Not at all

- Someone who has a learning difficulty or disability?
  Very / Not very / Not at all

- Someone with mental health issues?
  Very / Not very / Not at all

- Someone who has a neurodivergent condition (such as dyslexia, dyspraxia, epilepsy or being on the autistic spectrum)

  Very / Not very / Not at all

- Someone who has a chronic condition (such as fibromyalgia or ME)

  Very / Not very / Not at all

Please add any comments about what you would like to learn about working with any or all of the above groups.

i) Are you confident about making a document accessible to disabled people?

  Very / Not very / Not at all

j) Are you confident about making a meeting or event accessible to disabled people?

  Very / Not very / Not at all

k) Are you confident about working with a disabled person who has a support worker, personal assistant or carer?

Very / Not very / Not at all

l) Do you understand what co-production with disabled people and other service users involves and why it is important? (Please indicate all that apply)

- I know what co-production is and how to do it
- I know what co-production is but not how to do it
- I do not know what co-production is or how to do it
- I do not know why co-production is important

m) Do you know what independent living means and why it is important to disabled people?

Yes / No / A little

n) Have you heard of the social model of disability?

Yes / No / Maybe

- If yes, how confident are you about using the principles of the social model of disability in your work?

Very / Not very / Not at all

o) Please tell us anything else that you would like to learn about disabled people, disability rights and disability issues:

4. Action plan

This action plan enables you to record any actions you have identified in the self-assessment templates. Any criteria that scored 1, 2 or 3 (meaning there is some improvement to be made in this area), should be listed in the action plan below.

Each action should have a named person responsible for completing it and an agreed timescale. It may be necessary to seek expert advice from a local Deaf and Disabled People's Organisation or Shaping Our Lives to complete some of the actions.

These actions and progress should be reviewed regularly at staff meetings or at least every 6 months.

Criteria	Action required	Person to complete action	By when	Actions reviewed on	Outcome and further action

5. Shaping Our Lives resources for working with disabled women

This is a guide to online resources which should help you make your services, meetings and events accessible to disabled women. Links to online resources have been in embedded in this guide. The text which is a link to these documents/websites will usually be in a different font and underlined.

The links were active at the time of publication. We cannot take any responsibility for third party sites and views expressed by other organisations. The language used to describe disabled people and the barriers they experience may not reflect the Social Model of disability and may not be endorsed by Shaping Our Lives. Some resources, although written for a specific organisation or location, are still useful checklists which can be used generally.

Do please let us know if links need updating. If you search online for your own resources, be aware that they may not be from the UK and may use different language to preferred terms in general use in the UK.

Introduction

When organising any meeting or event for people who use or may use your services, it is important that you use the Equality Act 2010 as a guide to your legal responsibilities for providing equal access to goods and services for people in the nine protected characteristic groups.

Guidance on the Act is available on the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) website - The Equality Act 2010 - Guidance for service providers

What follows are some resources available online that will help you to offer inclusive and accessible services, meetings and events. We have used the term meeting and event interchangeably in this guide.

This Best Practice Toolkit has been produced by Shaping Our Lives Project – A Refuge for All

Resources have been grouped into 6 sections to help you identify sources of information and guidance to meet your needs. Many resources include links to other resources. Sometimes the resources describe the access needs for people with specific impairments or conditions. However, getting access right for specific groups usually improves access for all participants.

Very occasionally, access requirements will vary for different people, for example lighting levels, and individual participants will need to negotiate, perhaps with your support.

You should be very aware of barriers your organisation has in place which exclude disabled people from using your services, attending meetings or events. You have a duty to make reasonable adjustments for anyone who requires them.

You may already co-produce services with the people who use, or could use, your service or you may want to find out how to do it in the future. We have included a final section as a brief overview of good practice in Co-production.

The resources in this worksheet are free. Please credit the organisation who produced them if you use them. Do not reproduce them in full without express permission.

5.1 Organising accessible meetings and events resources

5.1.1 How to reach out to disabled people?

You first need to think how you will reach out to disabled people and attract them to your service, meeting or event. Think about working in partnership with a local user-led group of disabled people. These are community groups that are made up of disabled people and provide local services to other disabled people. In most

counties or large cities there will be Deaf and Disabled People's Organisations (DDPOs) and you can usually find them through an internet search. They will have valuable expertise to share with you.

There will be other organisations local to you that work with disabled people. Although not user led they will have contact databases and could send out information to local disabled people on your behalf.

There are membership databases of DDPOs held by these national and regional organisations:

Shaping Our Lives – a list of member organisations

Disability Rights UK – a list of members

GOV.UK (UK Government website) - a list of disability organisations in the UK (note this list has been officially withdrawn as of 2016 but is held in archive on the GOV.UK website as a resource).

Other local organisations that may provide details are:

- Your Local Government
- Your local HealthWatch
- Your local Community Voluntary Services organisation
- A Twitter search for #[your area] plus #disabled or #disability
- A Facebook search on location plus disabled/disability

Top tip

To be fully inclusive takes time and a budget to acquire the necessary skills. For a major event, if you have the budget, consider employing an expert.

5.1.2 Accessible communications

There are ways of producing information for services, meetings and events that make them inclusive for all people to read and understand, including people for whom English is not their first language. Write in Plain English, use a typeface such as Arial and offer information in different formats.

For an overview of what to think about when producing communications, refer to the NHS Accessible Information Standard (update 2017). This aims to make sure that disabled people with impairments or health conditions or sensory impairments get information that they can access and understand. All NHS services and organisations funded by the NHS have to follow the standard.

Be aware that the way people with impairments and health conditions are described can differ in other languages. The term 'disabled' may have a different meaning to that which it has in UK English. Get advice on this from local organisations who work with diverse communities.

Ensure important information is put clearly at the top of any communication, this may include times and venue details. Provide an alternative to email as a means by which people can contact you. Poverty and inaccessible technology are both barriers to many disabled people using online communication.

- Shaping Our Lives has an event registration form that asks access requirement questions.
- The United Kingdom Association of Accessible formats guide Creating Clear Print and Large Print documents is a detailed guide to producing printed materials.
- Ability Net has a general overview of meeting print and online communication needs - Producing Accessible Materials for Print and Online
- Document transcription - for getting documents transcribed into alternative formats for people living with sight loss contact RNIB or your local organisation supporting people with vision impairments.
- CHANGE - a user led organisation for adults with learning disabilities, has produced a guide to producing Easy Read documents - How to Make Information Accessible
- How to Write in Plain English is a guide produced by the Plain English Campaign. This organisation encourages the use of plain English in all written and verbal communication.

Top tip

Be prepared to communicate by text, phone, WhatsApp (and other social media) and maybe even by post.

5.1.3 Accessible buildings

If you are inviting disabled people to your service or an event, it is essential to check that the building is accessible throughout. Review the space yourself before deciding to use it. It is good practice to have an access audit too. Or if looking for an external venue, ask for recommendations from a local Deaf and Disabled People's Organisation. Staff attitudes are a major factor in whether a venue is suitable or not. Good access isn't just about door widths and ramps. What are the acoustics like? How flexible is the sensory environment? (Are lighting levels adjustable? Is there a quiet space?) Is there a long way for people to walk to the space once inside the venue?

Think about access outside the building which includes footpaths and pavements, dropped kerbs and slopes, proximity to public transport, ease and cost of parking. Disabled people with assistance dogs will need somewhere close for dog toileting.

Provide clear directions to your service or event venue including distances from drop-off points or public transport. If the building is out of the way or not clearly signed, include points of interest near to the building. Provide a photo of the building frontage and simple map and/or a link to Google maps.

Top tip

Describe the building as fully as possible, without making presumptions about the accessibility for different people.

For example do say:
The Town Hall has four steps to its main entrance. There is a handrail on one side of the steps.
Don't say:
The Town Hall is inaccessible for wheelchairs.

5.1.4 Holding inclusive meetings and events

Key considerations for holding inclusive meetings or events are to think about timing, practical arrangements, structure and expectation of participants. Think about the journeys people will have to make to get to the venue, the cost and availability at different times and the challenges of travelling at rush hour or in the dark. Disabled people can require a lot of notice to organise transport and/or a support worker. For people unable to travel to the meeting, is there an option for remote participation? This may be by Skype or Zoom, for example.

Think about the number of items on the agenda, whether participants are expected to move between activities and how information will be given during the event. Build in breaks which allow enough time to get in and out of the meeting space. Some people need longer to take a comfort break.

Describe what is going to happen and distribute this information well in advance of the meeting or event. Brief staff and organisers as well as participants.

Refreshments are not just a nice thing to offer – for some people eating regularly and keeping hydrated are important for managing their condition. Ask about dietary requests in advance and if you are providing food, make sure that all your participants are catered for in an equal way. Label all foods clearly.

- Shaping Our Lives has a guide to making events accessible.
- My Life My Choice, which is an organisation run by learning disabled people, have put together a list of things to think about when planning inclusive meetings (published on the CQC website).

- Birmingham Open Media (BOM) have [a web page article on making their services more autism friendly](#) but it also includes a list of things to think about in planning meetings to be autism friendly, written by a member of staff who is autistic.
- Individual disabled people In Canada give some tips about [what makes a meeting inclusive and excluding](#) in this You Tube video
- A group of self-advocates in Canada have prepared this You Tube video on [how to involve people who have different communications needs](#).

Top tip

Brightly coloured bottom-heavy mugs with handles and a box of straws make drinks accessible for most disabled people. Don't forget water for assistance dogs.

5.1.5 Running a meeting or event

It is essential that everyone who attends has an equal opportunity to contribute.

Ask for access and communication requirements prior to the meeting or event. Ensure you have materials in any format that has been requested. Never hand out important meeting papers on the day.

Hosting a meeting or event so it is inclusive for a broad range of people needs careful thought about the preparation of materials and a strong lead from a competent chairperson.

A barrier to inclusive involvement is the use of jargon and acronyms; try to conduct the meeting with as few as possible. Provide a jargon buster list beforehand and brief the chair to prompt speakers to further explain unfamiliar terms and concepts.

Conducting meetings:
- Seeds for Change have an access guidance published on their website for people facilitating meetings called Facilitators Guide for Making Meetings Accessible.
- Shaping Our Lives have a Guide for Presenters worksheet and a list of ground rules which are read out at the start of each meeting.

Access and communication needs:
- Being deaf aware will help support Deaf people and people with hearing loss in your meeting and the British Deaf Association has a webpage of face to face communication advice.
- There are other facilitators you might need to contract to run an inclusive event:
- British Sign Language (BSL) interpreters - Contact the Association of Sign Language Interpreters UK
- A palantypist (transcribing speech to text) - Contact the British Institute of Verbatim Reporters
- For interpreters and palantypists you will need to book two practitioners if your meeting is over a certain time period. Both specialists are in short supply so book ahead.
- A general support worker – a person with the skills to assist a range of disabled people to participate fully in the meeting.
- A personal care support worker – someone who can assist disabled people to use the toilet and other personal care requirements.
- Contact your local DDPO for advice on finding support workers.

Top tip
If the Chair sticks to the agenda and asks participants to:
- speak one at a time
- raise their hand to be called to speak
- say who they are

- speak clearly
- explain themselves in plain English

then this will make your meeting more inclusive and enjoyable.

5.1.6 Getting feedback and keeping in touch

Think about different inclusive ways that you can gather feedback. Don't just use a printed evaluation form. Smiley /sad face symbols are an alternative to numbered choices.

If you have organised an event to help you develop a new service or to get feedback on what you do, then remember to let participants know what has changed as a result of their input. Remember to keep accurate and up-to-date records of people who attend and make sure you contact them in their preferred way.

Be prepared for feedback from disabled people after your event on what you did wrong! Be proactive and encourage (constructive) criticism. It is a free learning opportunity and will help you make your event more accessible next time.

Ensure all your feedback mechanisms are inclusive, that all feedback is considered regardless of who makes it or how it is made. Many disabled people have negative experiences of not being heard or taken seriously. They might not express themselves in a way that is comfortable for you as an organisation or individual worker. Think about how you can enable that disabled person to carry on benefiting from your services.

Top tip

Often simple, low-cost solutions can make the difference between an inclusive event and a non-inclusive one. The key is good communication – ask the question "What can I do to meet your access requirements?"

5.1.7 Co-production

Listening to and respecting service users' voices and perspectives is an essential part, and often a statutory requirement, of developing quality services.

There are many resources available that detail how to work with people in an equal way, respecting the contribution from people with lived experience, service providers, academics health and social care workers. Reading these guides and reports will give you a good understanding of co-production and inclusive working.

- Shaping Our Lives have conducted research into the service user experience of involvement and engagement and produced two good practice guides published on the Shaping Our Lives website; one for practitioners and the other for service users.
- Also on the Shaping Our Lives website is the Beyond the Usual Suspects resource page; detailing how to avoid excluding service users from diverse communities in involvement activities.
- The National Survivors User Network (NSUN) website has a resource page 4Pi National Involvement Standards (developed and produced by people with lived experience of mental health issues/distress).
- Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE); Co-production in social care – what is it and how to do it resources on their website.
- The Equalities National Council and SCOPE report Over-looked communities; over-due for change reflects on the inclusion and exclusion of Black and Ethnic Minority (BME) disabled people.
- Croydon Learning Disability Partnership Board have produced their Terms of Reference in an Easy Read format. This is both a good example of putting a co-production framework in place and a producing information in Easy Read.

Top tip

The best way to ensure that activities designed to co-produce a service are accessible is to involve the target audience in the planning, delivery and evaluation of the event.

5.2 Quick and easy adaptations and access ideas

There are some inexpensive changes you could make to your service environment that would help some disabled women to use the service more easily. However, we do want to stress that each person is different and something that is more easily used by one disabled person could be less accessible for another person. We recommend that you ask any disabled women who use your services about their own preferences, but the ideas below are a useful starting point.

5.2.1 Accessing service information

- Have all your information available as plain text documents so that they can easily be adapted into other font sizes, printed on different colour paper or sent electronically if requested.
- Try to provide more than one way to access services. (We recognise that telephone may be the most secure way for someone to contact your service, but using the telephone is not possible for everyone).
- Ensure that women using your service are aware of how to register and use the text 999 service.
- Posters and information on blackboards and walls in your service can have a bar code that can be read by a mobile telephone and translated into voice output.
- Mobile phones - Apple iPhones have free speech output technology installed in all their handsets and this can be turned on in the settings. There is similar free speech output available for Android handsets. This could assist someone who has difficulty accessing print and electronic text.

5.2.2 Entrances and doorways

- Check that the entrance bell/intercom is at an accessible height for someone in a wheelchair or someone of restricted height. If not, have the intercom lowered or provide another way of accessing the building. (Note - if a refuge has an inaccessible entrance bell/intercom, an alternative way of getting in may not be safe if it takes longer).

- Have a portable ramp if there are steps or a small set of stairs.
- Clearly mark the edge of steps, ideally using nosing. This should be in a contrasting colour to the step itself.
- Provide pictures of the front of buildings and entrances if possible.
- Do not clutter approach pathways, entrances, and internal spaces.

5.2.3 Kitchen areas

- Have a tray near the kettle for placing cups on when making hot drinks. The tray will contain any spillages.
- Try to have crockery and equipment that is a contrasting colour to the kitchen worktop so it can be easily seen.
- Have a simple timer near the cooker.
- Have a jar opener to help with tight lids.

5.2.4 General areas including living areas

- Have a simple colour coding system for different rooms within the building so people do not have to rely on being able to read signs. This can be supported with dots or arrows in the same colour marking the way and/or a colour coded building plan.
- Use table cloths and throws to make furniture contrast with carpets and walls if they don't already. Ensure these are not all the way to the ground – this can create a hazard for people using wheelchairs.
- Have dimmer switches on all room lights so brightness can be adjusted.
- Use black-out curtains to help with sleeping.
- Sensory and tactile toys/objects such as stress balls can aid relaxation. Other relaxing accessories include lava lamps and fish tanks.
- Televisions - Most programmes broadcast on the main channels for example, BBC and ITV now have audio description, sign language and sub titles enabling people with a range of sensory and cognitive impairments to access television more equally. This can be enabled by turning on these functions in the television settings.

5.2.5 Useful aids

- Get a bed raiser so the height of a bed can be changed, available for about £80.
- Grab rails in bathroom and bedroom areas can help someone maintain their independence.
- A grabber (similar to a litter picker) can be bought from most garden outlets or a mobility aid shop and is useful for someone who cannot easily bend to pick things up.
- A variety of chair types are helpful so people can choose one that is comfortable for them or enables them to transfer from a wheelchair to a chair for example, a high back chair for someone who needs head support, a reclining chair for someone with an energy impairment.
- Clocks - The Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB) sell talking clocks and watches designed for people who have vision impairments and may be helpful for people who have difficulty telling the time.

5.2.6 Specialist equipment

- The Fire Service can provide vibrating pillows and flashing light fire alarms for people with hearing impairments. They will also advise on personal evacuation plans for disabled women.
- Your Local Authority Adult Service team may be able to provide some access equipment for disabled women.
- Find a local Deaf and Disabled People's Organisation or voluntary and community sector organisation and ask if they lend equipment or have a second-hand equipment service.
- Visit the Disability Equipment Service website (www.disabilityequipmentservice.co.uk) where second-hand equipment can be sourced and purchased inexpensively.

5.3 Diversity and inclusion service commitment

Below is an example of a service commitment to providing accessible and inclusive violence and abuse services. If your service is confident it can provide services to disabled women, you may want to use this service commitment to demonstrate this.

(Front cover or first page)

Our commitment to making violence and abuse services accessible

This document explains how we will work to help disabled women and women from all communities to use our violence and abuse support services. This service commitment was developed by Shaping Our Lives as part of the Refuge for All project improving access to services for disabled women experiencing violence and abuse.

[Insert details of your services:]

Helpline: (Freephone)
Counselling:
Emergency Accommodation (refuge):
Family Support:
Safety Unit including Outreach,
Courts, Civil Orders & MARAC:
General Enquiries:
Textphone:

(Inside pages if a leaflet)

Our commitment to provide accessible services to women from all communities, including disabled women, means we will…

Make our services accessible by:

- Working together to ensure our services are accessible to you
- Explaining all the services we offer and help you to decide which services best meet your needs
- Treating you as an individual
- Being flexible and adapting our service to meet your needs
- Using languages and communication methods that are suitable for you including using professional interpreters wherever possible (NB Service may wish to add that they have specialist language workers here)
- Not using jargon or acronyms when we speak to you

Provide safety & confidentiality by:

- Prioritising you and your children's immediate safety
- Respecting your confidentiality
- Getting consent to share your information – the only time we would share information about you without consent was if we thought you or someone else was in immediate danger
- Keeping records so you get the right help and support now and in the future
- Telling you about any work we do that may affect you or your children

Support you by:

- Listening, believing and caring
- Explaining what your rights are
- Telling you what is realistic and possible
- Helping you decide what to do
- Supporting you to access other services, information and resources

Support your children by:

- Supporting you in your role as a parent
- Helping you to access services for your children
- Providing children's workers and space to play in all our refuges
- Being honest about any action we need to take so you can protect your child

Keep high service standards by:

- Providing you with opportunities to give us feedback on the services you receive
- Telling you of any changes we make to our services because of your feedback
- Making the time you wait to use a service as short as possible
- Ensuring the staff you work with are police checked, well trained and supported to do their job
- Providing consistent and reliable services

Help us to help you

- Tell us how we can make our services accessible for you
- Let us know if you are unable to make an appointment
- Tell us if you are not happy with the service you are receiving
- Follow our house rules if you are living in one of our refuges
- Inform us of any changes to your personal circumstances
- Treat our staff and other women using our services with respect

(Back cover if this is a leaflet)
This leaflet is also available in other languages and formats, please contact us on xxx or visit our website xxx.

Service address and contact details
Charity or company registration

5.4 Accessibility policy and procedure

Below is an example of an accessibility policy and procedure. We are very grateful to the Young Women's Housing Project and Disabled Survivors Unite for sharing this with the project. This policy can be used to support processes to be inclusive and accessible.

Example accessibility policy and procedure

Introduction
This policy details how the (name of service) aims to meet the access and communication needs of the women and children that we work with to make our service more accessible and inclusive.

This policy follows the Department of Health Accessible Information Implementation Guidance (July 2015).

Terminology:
Access and communication **barriers** refer to any physical or attitudinal barrier which may hinder a woman's ability to use and engage with the service.

- Access barriers may arise when a woman has a disability
- Communication barriers may arise with both disabled and non-disabled women.

Access and communication **needs** refer to the requirement of an adjustment which should be put in place to remove barriers to engagement.

For example, an access barrier would be steps into a building that prevent a wheelchair user from entering. Their need would be for a ramp to be available. A communication barrier would be workers communicating with clients purely via phone calls which would hinder communication with a deaf client. Their need would be for texts or a textphone to be used.

Procedure
1. **Identifying Need:**

When a client is referred to us we will gather information on their access and communication needs in the following ways:

- By speaking to the client herself on the phone, if appropriate and/or the referring agent for further information.
- Via the face to face referral assessment meeting with the client and the referring agent.
- We will also contact any other specialist agencies supporting the client for further information if this is appropriate, and with the client's agreement.

This will help us to make a decision on whether we can provide the support the client needs to access our service and plan any adjustments we can reasonably make.

We will ensure that all staff attend training on accessibility and communication so that they are able to obtain and record information sensitively and accurately; and that the project encourages an inclusive and empathic approach when discussing a client's needs.

2. Recording Needs
A client's access and/or communication needs are recorded on their referral form, and if accepted to the service on their personal record sheet and support plan. These records are confidential to the team.

A fundamental principle of the Accessible Information Standard is that client's should self-define their communication support needs and **it is these needs** (and not their disability) that should be recorded. This ensures that an individual receives the support they need. Recording that a person is deaf, for example, does not explain whether they can read written English, use British sign language, lip-read or use a hearing aid.

3. Flagging Up Access and Communication Needs
Accessibility and/or communication needs are flagged up in the Client Contact File, by ticking the appropriate column alongside their name and contact details, so that staff are reminded of this every time they contact her. Workers should then refer to the client's personal record sheet for more detail of these needs and any adjustments needed.

This information should be regularly reviewed. Any changes should immediately be updated in the client's personal record sheet/support plan and contact information sheet. Updated information should also be discussed in the weekly team meeting, so that all staff are aware of any changes.

4. Sharing Information With Other Services
We will share information about our clients' access and/or communication needs with other organisations only if it is appropriate and if we have their consent. We will follow (name of service) policy and procedure on Confidentiality and Data protection and adhere to partnership information sharing protocols.

5. Meeting Needs
To help our service be more accessible we will:
• Make reasonable adjustments to our publicity and website to ensure they are accessible to those with communication needs.
• Provide a digital copy of key documents and policies to people who use screen readers, ensuring that documents sent are created as a text document rather than a scanned copy (as the latter cannot be read by screen readers).
• Provide 'quick read' and 'easy read' versions of key documents and policies and print in large font and appropriate coloured paper where required.
• Take into account any needs a client has to ensure they can take part in our groups/activities and access our buildings and accommodation, and make reasonable adjustments wherever we can.
• Make links with specialist organisations such as disability advocacy services and BSL interpretation services to ensure clients' needs are fully supported.

6. When We Cannot Support a Woman
We will always try our best to make any necessary adjustments to meet a woman's needs so that she can access our accommodation. When this is not possible, we may still be able to offer outreach support to clients in their own accommodation. If it is not possible for us to support a woman in any capacity we would signpost them on to a service which can, for example a local DDPO who provide information and advocacy for local disabled people.

7. Complaints
Clients and referrers are asked to refer to the (name of service) Complaints Policy if they are unhappy about any aspect of the service they have received. We welcome feedback that will enable us to make positive changes to the service.

Staff Training and Supervision Procedures

- All staff, as part of their induction, will be given a copy of the Accessibility Policy and have it explained to them.
- Regular refresher training will be held on the Accessibility Policy to update staff knowledge and ensure consistency and sensitivity in responding to situations.
- Any difficulties in delivering the Accessibility Policy will be addressed in individual supervision, and in the weekly team meeting. Where necessary, further training or skills development will be made available.

Monitoring and Reviewing

This policy is reviewed every three years as part of our Policy Review Programme. We undertake an annual review of our referral and service delivery statistics to ensure that our service is accessible to as many women as possible within our remit. We gather client and referrer feedback during the referral procedure, and annual client feedback on the service we provide to ensure we are meeting client's needs.

The results of these reviews and any recommendations from them are used to update our policy and procedure, to inform our service delivery and ensure continued development and good practice within the organisation. This information is provided to our Trustees at bi-monthly Management Committee meetings, to staff at the weekly team meeting or via 1-2-1 supervision, to our clients via keyworker or group meetings and to our funders via their own monitoring requirements.

Agreed at Management Committee Meeting of:_____(*insert date*).

Signed:_____ (On behalf of management committee).

Print Name:_____

Date:_____

Signed:_____ (Service Manager).

Print Name:_____

Date:_____

5.5 Disability relevant poster

The poster to the right has been kindly shared by Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Partnership. An advisory group of disabled women, who have been central to the A Refuge for All project, have adapted the poster so it is fully accessible. The poster reflects some of the feelings and experiences that disabled women have shared with the project.

Shaping Our Lives can arrange for this poster to be personalised with your service details. Please contact us if you would like to use this poster. It will be necessary to share your self-assessment and action plan with us so we can be sure you are ready to promote your service to disabled women.

6. Equality Act 2010 definition of a disabled person

This definition and other information is available from the following website:
https://www.gov.uk/definition-of-disability-under-equality-act-2010

We also recommend that you download and read the 'Equality Act 2010: what do I need to know? Disability quick start guide'
(https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/85011/disability.pdf).

You're disabled under the Equality Act 2010 if you have a physical or mental impairment that has a 'substantial' and 'long-term' negative effect on your ability to do normal daily activities.

The Equality Act 2010 doesn't apply to Northern Ireland.

What 'substantial' and 'long-term' mean:
- 'substantial' is more than minor or trivial, for example, it takes much longer than it usually would to complete a daily task like getting dressed
- 'long-term' means 12 months or more, for example, a breathing condition that develops as a result of a lung infection

There are special rules about recurring or fluctuating conditions, for example, arthritis.

Progressive conditions:
A progressive condition is one that gets worse over time. People with progressive conditions can be classed as disabled.

However, you automatically meet the disability definition under the Equality Act 2010 from the day you're diagnosed with HIV infection, cancer or multiple sclerosis.

What isn't counted as a disability:

There's guidance on conditions that aren't covered by the disability definition, for example, addiction to non–prescribed drugs or alcohol.

7. Acknowledgements

Shaping Our Lives would like to thank the disabled women with lived experience of violence and abuse who have informed the Shaping Our Lives A Refuge for All project over the last two years. Without their courage and commitment to improving access to violence and abuse services for other disabled women, Shaping Our Lives would not have been able to develop this toolkit and work with the pilot sites so effectively. A special thank you is given to the disabled women who shared their personal stories and allowed me to use these to raise awareness of the experiences of disabled women.

Shaping Our Lives would also like to thank Birmingham and Solihull Women's Aid and Bexley Women's Aid for taking part in the pilot activities and for their commitment to learn and integrate our recommendations.

Our gratitude also goes to Women's Aid Federation for their support with this project and, in particular, Ruth Mason, Business Development Lead for Change That Lasts.

Finally, we are extremely grateful to the user-led groups Disabled Survivors Unite and Stay Safe East for sharing their expertise, to Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Partnership for allowing us to use a poster they had developed, to Young Women's Housing Project for sharing their accessibility Policy and Procedure, to the DCMS Tampon Tax Fund and to our dedicated project worker Vicky.

"Only by listening to and working equally with disabled women experiencing violence and abuse, will we be able to increase their sense of self-worth and remove the practical, prejudicial and systemic barriers that exclude them from using services."

Becki Meakin
General Manager of Shaping Our Lives and author of this toolkit.

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