

## **Access to good customer service**

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There are more than 11 million people in the UK who could be defined as disabled, 20% of the population. Good customer service is an essential element to accessing tourist and leisure destinations for disabled people, just as important as the physical accessibility to the building. If you can't get passed the person on the door, it is pointless having an accessible environment.

As a disabled person myself, I have first hand knowledge on how access can be prevented by poor customer service, I won the first legal case under the Disability Discrimination Act when I and my Guide Dog were prevented from entering a cinema. So, in more than twenty years of working on disability issues, I give as much thought to how disabled people are treated as customers as I do on how to access buildings. How visitors are received on arrival and assisted during their visit determines how well they have enjoyed their visit.

At the V&A, I have promoted inclusion by developing staff training packages, offering a staff a suite of training packages which promote a high customer welcome. The training focuses upon the breaking down of attitudinal barriers and giving staff the knowledge and confidence of how to assist disabled visitors. Front of House and Learning staff receive: general Disability Awareness, dispelling myths and giving practical techniques; Visual and Deaf Awareness, showing how to communicate and assist; Mental Health Awareness, breaking down the myths behind the condition. More than 40 members of the Front of House staff have learnt to use British Sign Language to Level 2 to welcome deaf visitors. This package helped the museum to be held as best practice for our customer services by the Employers Forum on Disability.

Sport is a passion and I have worked with many sporting organisations and governing bodies to promote access to stadia. Building on this work, I contributed to Destination London a training package developed for the London 2012 Olympics. The Greater London Authority developed Destination London, a free online training course for staff in the tourism, hospitality and retail sectors. The course enable staff to gain a greater understanding of how to better meet the needs of disabled customers and to provide a first rate customer service. The London welcome was one of the major factors in the success of the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic games. my day-to-day work.