

ENABLE Solihull

Enabling SOLIHULL PEOPLE to lead the fullest possible life whatever their personal health or physical difficulties

Newsletter No. 1

May 2010

My experience as a disabled train traveller



I can honestly say that before 2003 I was a relative stranger to travelling on trains. This situation changed in 03 when I became a student at Staffordshire University's Stoke-On-Trent Campus. One of my friends asked if I fancied going to watch Birmingham City play Newcastle United at St Andrews. As a keen Blues fan I jumped at chance, but one problem existed: how could we get from Stoke to Birmingham? It was a lot to expect my Dad to do the hundred mile round journey particularly as Stoke-On-Trent railway station was only a stone's throw from my halls of residence. I made some enquires and discovered the rail enquiries website,

www.nationalrail.co.uk, which gives details on train times and destinations. The next step was to buy tickets and book assistance. This was done at the station and everything was in place for my maiden voyage. The first journey proved a success and whetted my appetite for future trips. In terms of assistance, my needs were met by the use of two ramps that enable me to drive my electric wheelchair on and off trains. In the 21st century it seems strange that such a very basic method is still used to get me on and off. In addition, such assistance leaves you in the hands of station porters up and down the country. Several times I have had to rely on a member of

the public to fetch a porter for me. It is fair to say that I have my heart in my mouth every time I approach my stop.

On several occasions my problems have only started after boarding the train. I should explain that an empty space is reserved for wheelchair passengers. In theory it should be easy to park my electric wheelchair in the designated area - if only life was that simple! It is not uncommon to see either a pushchair or a suitcase occupying this space. Often a stressed-out porter will have to ask for the removal of the offending item.

Aside from access, the issue of comfort is very important to me. Last summer I was travelling from Coventry to Marston

Continued on page 2



Steve Coulter
(Enable-Solihull
Volunteer)

Welcome to the first Enable-Solihull newsletter, produced by people who have disabilities and carers. Articles about your experiences and useful information may be included. Volunteer Steve Coulter (above) has supplied a number of articles for this edition. Please get in touch if you would like to submit an article or have ideas for content. We offer assistance to anyone who would like support to compile an article.

AIR TRAVEL TIPS

By Steve Coulter (Enable-Solihull Volunteer)



The process of arranging a holiday is time consuming for the able-bodied but can be doubly so for a disabled person. Last month, together with another volunteer Olive England, I attended the Passengers with Reduced Mobility (PRM) Working Group at Birmingham Airport, which

aims to improve access from booking in to boarding your aircraft. Before allowing you to board an aircraft an airline will need to be notified of your needs. During the meeting it became obvious that this is very much a two way arrangement. The airport personnel informed us that it is not unusual for a disabled person to turn up

Continued on page 2

My experience as a disabled train traveller (...continued from page 1)



Green when I had a call of nature.

Much to my frustration the toilet was locked, my discomfort was shared by several other able-bodied passengers who wished to make use of the convenience.

I emailed the London Midland operator who run the service, who wrote back to inform me that the water tank was being emptied at the time.

Unfortunately I have used the same service since and encountered the same problem. Sometimes even getting to the platform has proved impossible. At one time I was unable to travel from Birmingham International station for several months because the lift was out of order.

It is important to stress that travelling by train is not usually a negative experience. As a disabled person this mode of transport has enabled me to visit many friends and places around the country. Since leaving university the procedure to book assistance has altered. As I mentioned earlier I used to make the arrangements by visiting Stoke station. My Dad now books assistance by phoning the Journeycare call centre on **08457 443 366**. Anyone wishing to get help

needs to call this number because the system prohibits passengers from phoning their local station. As my nearest station is a car ride away face to face bookings would be very time consuming. It is a pity that contact with local stations is forbidden as often Journeycare calls are lengthy.

As a final point, I would recommend the purchase of a Disabled Persons railcard. The railcard entitles you to one third off most train fares in Britain. You can pay £18 for a card lasting one year or £48 for a card covering three years. Further details can be found by visiting www.disabledpersons-railcard.co.uk or by telephoning **0845 605 0525**.

Steve Coulter

AIR TRAVEL TIPS (...continued from page 1)

on the day without giving the airline or the airport authorities prior warning that they require assistance. This places a strain on both staff and resources. One way of overcoming such a problem is to increase the public's awareness of the notice required by the airline and the airport.

OCS are the service provider at Birmingham and the airline should give them at least 36 hours notification of each passengers requirements. It is essential to give the airline advance warning of your needs. For additional reassurance OCS can be telephoned on **0121 767 7878** or emailed at bhx.prm@ocs.co.uk If your needs fluctuate and you are not sure whether or not you will need assistance on the day, you should still book the help as it can be easily be cancelled when you reach the airport.

Other airports will have their own service providers but the same requirements to notify the airlines at the time of booking any assistance required is essential. A representative from the Equality & Human Rights

Commission gave a short talk on European law with regard to assistance you can receive when flying from Europe. This help is explained in **Your Rights to Fly** - a step by step guide for disabled and less mobile passengers It can be obtained by telephoning **08456 046 610** or downloaded from www.equalityhumanrights.com/travel

I was alarmed to hear that several airlines have started charging passengers for the transportation of their oxygen cylinders. Apparently some operators consider these cylinders as a medical need.

Anyone wishing to take liquids on the flight needs to follow strict laws. At the moment passengers can only take a container carrying up to 100ml. The container must then be placed within a transparent bag. If liquid medication is needed to be carried on board and exceeds this limit, a doctor's note must be brought with you.

Steve Coulter

OPENBRITAIN.NET

A new website has recently been launched to improve the quality of lives for millions of people with disabilities. The Open Britain website is the result of a partnership between DisabledGo and Tourism for All UK. The site is a comprehensive survey of access facilities at 50,000 leisure and public service venues around the

country. The list of locations includes cinemas, hotels and hospitals amongst others.

Every venue listed has a set of symbols alongside. These symbols denote if the attraction is suitable for wheelchair users, the visually impaired and people with hearing problems.

Further symbols cover areas such as

the provision for parking, disabled toilets, large print/Braille services and the inclusion of a sound enhancement system.

These are of course early days for the Open Britain site and the service will grow to include more attractions in time. The Open Britain web site can be viewed by going to www.openbritain.net

Working together on transport

Solihull Action through Advocacy (SA_tA) a local charity supporting people with learning disabilities, recently teamed up with *Enable-Solihull* to address transport issues for residents in Solihull borough.

SA_tA facilitates a self-advocacy group called "Changing Lives". This group talks about issues in the community and looks at positive action they can take. In November 2009 the group decided to address the subject of public transport.

Although all modes of transport were discussed, one type of transport came in for a lot of criticism: buses.

Some of the "Changing Lives" group have physical disabilities. They talked about buses that don't meet the kerb properly, expecting passengers to struggle into the road. Others members talked about buses pulling off before they were seated.

Some members of the group talked about behaviour on the buses. Many had witnessed acts of aggression on the bus or had been harassed by unruly teenagers and children.

Another issue for some was timetables. Often, for someone with a learning disability, a timetable can be hard to read and confusing. Many people felt that an easy read timetable should be made available by the bus operators.

The "Changing Lives" group decided to take positive action and write to the local bus operator (National Express) asking them if they would address their concerns.

It didn't happen straight away but after a few phone calls and one or two apologies for delays, National Express invited the Changing Lives group to their offices in Acocks Green.

Mick Fox, the Area Manager for National Express, gave the self-advocacy group a tour of the depot (including a quick spin through the bus wash!) and then invited questions from the "Changing Lives" members.

National Express responded to all the "Changing Lives" group's questions. Of course, there is two sides to every story and National Express were able explain some of the difficulties in meeting expectations. They did recommend that if people were unhappy with an incident on a bus or with the way the driver had acted, then to make a note of the 4 digit number on the outside of the bus and report it to Travel West Midlands.

National Express also acknowledged that more could possibly be done with the driver training package in relation to learning disability awareness. SA_tA has offered to work in conjunction with National Express to make a training video which could be used in driver training.

Through the Healthier Communities Board *Enable-Solihull* and SA_tA arranged to meet with Chris Perry (Head of Operations) and Sal Bohal (Equality Officer) from Centro where we learnt about the steps Centro are already taking to address the problems. These include driver assessments by qualified examiners to identify where additional training is needed. It is hoped that this scheme will be extended subject to funding.

Bal Sohal talked about a marketing campaign which will be initiated by *Centro* this year. She has invited *Enable-Solihull* and SA_tA members to be involved, in the hope that a positive message can be given about how *Centro* is improving services for people with physical and learning disabilities. We have more to learn about this campaign and will keep our members posted on this and other developments.

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...enabling Solihull people to lead the fullest possible life whatever their personal health or physical difficulties

We're on the Web!

www.enable-solihull.org.uk

Registered Charity No: 1095566

Company No: 4465116

Enable-Solihull are now holding a weekly drop-in session at the YOU+ Health Shop in Chelmsley Wood Shopping Centre. We can provide disability advice and connect you with services that can help you. The session takes place every Friday afternoon from 2.00pm - 4.00pm. No appointment is necessary.

Enable-Solihull would like to hear from you about any difficulties you have getting places such as shops, cafes and public buildings. For example, you may experience difficulties entering buildings in a wheelchair, or heavy doors or problematic uneven paths. We can take up these issues on your behalf and encourage businesses to improve their facilities. Please contact us on **0121 788 1544** or info@enable-solihull.org.uk to let us know of any problems.

PERSONALISATION

Personalisation is a government agenda aimed at transforming the social care system. A **Personal Budget** is the amount of money that your care costs and people receiving social care will in the future be able to make choices on how this money is spent on supporting them. A Personal Budget might be spent on employing a Personal Assistant, on social or leisure activities, or to buy help with transport. There are a number of ways in which a Personal Budget can be managed, for example the money can be given to the service user as a Direct Payment or the money can be managed by another party such as a carer, or an organisation such as Solihull Care Trust.

News Snippets

Parkmobility is a scheme providing wheelchairs for visits to local parks. Wheelchairs can be hired from Tudor Grange Leisure Centre and North Solihull Sports Centre. The wheelchairs provided are fully collapsible. In order to hire a wheelchair you will need to show two proofs of address and pay a £3 daily hire charge plus a £10 refundable deposit. For further information please telephone Solihull Park Rangers on **0121 704 8472**

Lowbrook Stroke Club has places for new members who are recovering from a stroke. The club meets on Tuesdays from 10.00am - 2.00pm at Whitesmore Nursery, Chapehouse Road in Chelmsley Wood. Please call Jan Ryan on **0121 770 1077** for further details.