



# Accessible Church: “Many parts but one body”?

Facilitated by Katie Budd and Grace Bloxham of Through the Roof

## Numbers

- 1 in 6 of the global population (1.3 billion) experience significant disability in their lives (*World Health Organisation*).
- In the UK 1 in 4 of the population (16 million) are disabled (*Scope*). This is the same number as there are children and young people under 18.

**Consider:** How much of the church’s time, energy, volunteers, resources and paid workers goes into Under 18s ministry? How much of it goes into disability ministry?

## Issues

- Disabled people are more likely to live in poverty (*Joseph Rowntree Foundation*)
- Disabled people are three times as likely to be economically inactive compared with non-disabled people (*Scope*)
- Statistically disabled people have less access to the internet, appropriate housing, leisure opportunities (*ONS*)
- People with Learning Disabilities are more likely to be subject to Do Not Resuscitate orders in hospital (*Mencap*)
- 96% of disabled people aged 18 – 34 reported experiencing negative attitudes from the others (*Scope*)
- 67% of non-disabled people feel awkward talking to disabled people (*Scope*)
- Sadly, exclusion extends to church life: Only 5 - 10% of the world's population of disabled people will hear the Gospel in their lifetime (*Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization*)

**Consider:** How do you respond to these findings?

## Theology

- We are all created in God’s image (*Genesis 1:26*)
- All of us have sinned and fallen short (*Romans 3:23*)
- God’s desire is that no-one should perish (*2 Peter 3:9*)
- God’s grace is sufficient. His power is made perfect in weakness (*2 Corinthians 12:9*)
- We all need one another in life’s struggles. “Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ” (*Galatians 6:2*)
- “As it is there are many parts, but one body...Those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable...there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other...If one part suffers, every part suffers with it”. (*1 Corinthians 12:12,22,25,26*)

- God's kingdom is incomplete without disabled people and we have a mandate for mission: 'Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the town. Bring in those who are poor. Also bring those who can't see or walk...Make the people come in. I want my house to be full'. (*Luke 14:12-24*)

**Consider:** How do you respond to these verses?

## Stories

God is working in and through disabled people to further His kingdom. Here's Sarah's story of how her church enabled Access, Belonging and Commission...

Sarah says, "I have Down's Syndrome and severe hearing loss... as I do things slowly people don't always know how to talk to me, or don't know it's ok to wait for me to reply before asking another question, so I overload and can't reply. I felt excluded because everyone had a job, and I didn't even though I wanted to help."

"Angie and Carolyn, our Churchwardens, asked me if there was anything I would like to do, as they wanted to include me. I am now the 'chief snuffer': I snuff out the candles after the service. Sometimes I also read the bible lesson, which I like to do. I am also part of the washing up team, we have a lot of fun while doing jobs. I am happy because I am helping, and I feel part of a team."

Sarah's mum Lesley says, "Sarah enjoys being part of the life of the church. She is welcomed with enthusiasm by the church members, others have taken Angie and Carolyn's lead and are very supportive. Sarah always has a big smile on her face when she is included."

**Consider:** What are you doing now as a church in relation to disabled people?

## A framework for disability inclusion

Through the Roof has developed the ABC model for churches to consider the journey of disability inclusion...

- **Access:** For everyone to know Jesus with disabled people fully welcomed into Christian life.
- **Belonging:** For everyone to grow together as the family of God, with disabled people flourishing in community with others.
- **Commission:** For everyone to reflect the character of Jesus, with disabled people making disciples, to the glory of God.

**Consider:** What does Access/ Belonging/ Commission look like in your context? How can your church create a culture that enables disabled people?

**Through the Roof's Roofbreaker project equips churches to offer Access, Belonging and Commission:** <https://throughtheroof.org/forchurches/roofbreakers>  
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Find out more about Through the Roof at: [www.throughtheroof.org](http://www.throughtheroof.org)

