



Access all areas?

***Trailblazers'* snapshot report on access to live music**

June 2013

Introduction

Since the implementation of the Equality Act 2010, and legislation dating back to 1995, it has been illegal for service providers to treat disabled people less favourably than any other customers. Service providers, including live music venues, must make reasonable adjustments so that disabled people can enjoy the same services and facilities as their non-disabled friends, family and colleagues.

Executive summary

In 2009, we published our *Calling Time* report on access to leisure activities. We touched on music venues in that report, but as this is a subject that regularly comes up at *Trailblazers'* meetings and on our online forum TalkMD, we have now dedicated a full report to accessing live music.

In May and June 2013, *Trailblazers* carried out an investigation into disability and live music. We asked 100 young disabled music fans to describe what they thought was good and not so good when it came to booking tickets and accessing venues to see their favourite musicians play live.

The picture is not a straightforward one. Many of our members have told us that they think live music promoters and venues are doing a decent job of considering and acting on what disabled music fans need and want, and that is to have the same experience as their non-disabled peers. However, the same problems kept coming up when it came to booking concert and festival tickets: the location of wheelchair accessible seating areas and company policies together often mean that many disabled music lovers find themselves isolated from friends and family at a show.

Going to concerts and festivals is a fundamental part of social life for many young people in the United Kingdom. It simply has to be an inclusive activity.

Enjoying live music is important to me as a young disabled person because...

"It gives me the opportunity to go out and enjoy a decent night out like any other person my age."

Johnathon Byrne, Norwich

"Music is a social experience that can be enjoyed and participated in equally by disabled and non-disabled young people."

Catherine Alexander, The Wirral

"I'm the same as anyone else, so why shouldn't I go and see bands and DJs I like playing live?"

Marc, South West

"I would like to go to more live music events. I am a human with human experiences; I want to experience something bigger than myself. There is no disability because of music, and it should be free for all to enjoy."

Matilda Ibini, London

"I like to spend my money on things I enjoy. Live music is one of those things."

James Lee, London

"Music is a big part of my life - listening, appreciating and making music. I don't want my disability to stop me from accessing something in life I enjoy. Attending gigs/performances/venues are important for my wellbeing, socially and culturally."

S Prescott, South East

"I find live music something I look forward to most. It's great to see a band you love live. It's a good escape. I love the atmosphere, especially at festivals."

Gemma, East of England

"It's an important part of being independent and having social interaction with friends and family."

Bhavni Shah, London

"Music is basically my life and I don't see why I should miss out seeing live music just because I'm disabled! I have just as much right to go and see live music as any other 'normal' 16-year-old."

Laura Bizzey, Norfolk

"I go to the Download rock festival almost every year. I go with a group of friends and two PAs I really enjoy the music and meeting new people and making new friends."

Christina Humphries, Middlesbrough

"If you attend with the right people and are kind of sure that the venue will be manageable for you, then there is no reason why a disabled person shouldn't enjoy live music as much as a non-disabled person."

Elora Kadir, London

Key findings

- Nine out of ten of young disabled people said that more inclusive seating designs, which would enable disabled people to sit with more than just one friend or assistant, would make a big difference to their experience of watching live music.
- Sixty-four percent of young disabled people said booking tickets was the hardest thing about accessing live music.
- Seventy-seven percent of young disabled people agreed that, “Booking tickets for a live music event as a young disabled person puts me at a substantial disadvantage compared to non-disabled friends.”
- One in two young disabled people thought physical access was the biggest factor that stopped them going to a live music event.
- Half of the young disabled people said that venue facilities, such as toilets, bars and food stalls, were not suitable for their needs.
- Ninety-four percent of young disabled people said that last minute ticketing websites, such as Seatwave.com, did not cater for disabled people.
- A quarter of young disabled people book live music event tickets online yet 83 percent would like to be able to do this.
- One out of two young disabled people says that they have either missed out on tickets or had a stressful experience because, as a disabled person, it is harder to book tickets for live music.
- Small venues and arenas were almost twice as popular with disabled customers as festivals.

Action needed

- Music promoters and venues need to make it possible for disabled people to be able to buy tickets online.
- Music venues need to work with young disabled people to overcome socially isolating situations where music fans are separated from friends and family at concerts.
- Disabled toilets and low-level bars need to be located near wheelchair accessible platforms and seating areas.
- Music venues should sign up to and strive towards achieving the highest standards of Attitude is Everything's Charter Awards.¹

¹ www.attitudeiseverything.org.uk/the-charter-of-best-practice

Venue design and accessibility

- Nine out of ten of young disabled people said that more inclusive designs, that meant disabled people would be able to sit with more than just one friend or assistant, would make a big difference to their experience of watching live music.
- Half of young disabled thought physical access was the biggest factor that stopped them going to a live music event
- 50% of young disabled people said that venue facilities like toilets were a problem for them when they went to see live music.
- Half of the young disabled people said that facilities provided at venues like toilets, bars and food stalls were not suitable to their needs.

Trailblazers' say.....

"The venues don't prevent able-bodied people queuing for the disabled toilet. I have missed getting back to seat before show starts and lights go out due to this."

Fiona, Scotland

"You can forget about refreshments or toilets as I would never get out and back in time. By the time I get out and to the counter or to the top of the queue for the accessible toilet (because it is being used by non-disabled people too) everyone is heading back and I would miss the second half."

Barbara Midrash, Northern Ireland

"Generally speaking, once I have arrived at a venue and taken my place I am stuck there until the concert is over. Crowds and poor access routes to bar/toilets etc. generally mean it is impossible for me to move around the venue once the gig has started. It is also impossible to order drinks at the bar due to the volume of the venue and my being so low down."

Zoë Hallam, Bristol

"At the most recent event I was approached and asked to leave the stadium before the last set had even finished, so I could 'beat the rush and not get in the way of the other people leaving'."

Hannah-Lou Blackall, King's Lynn

"The accessible sections of venues are not always advertised very well. On more than one occasion I've turned up to an event and found that the disabled seating area isn't always as 'accessible' as they think it is. Staff are usually (there's always an exception!) pretty helpful when you ask them for help, but they do generally seem pretty clueless at first, e.g. not knowing where the disabled seating area is, having to ask other staff, sometimes even having to improvise an area because they don't know where the real disabled area is! (This tends to be at smaller venues.) These 'improvised' disabled seating areas are not well thought out – I've been placed in the corner of the balcony

area where we could barely see the stage; at the balcony railing but surrounded by standing ticket holders who were pushing us forward to get a better view and wouldn't let me stand up when I got a cramp in my leg; and in the corner right at the front of the stage on a bar stool – great view but almost got crushed when the singer decided to come into the audience and the crowd got very excited!"

Mathy Selvakumaran, Worksop

"I think the live music industry is generally very good with providing for disabled customers. Of course not every venue is accessible and/or has the facilities that disabled customers require but I think that certainly within my lifetime there have been real improvements and organisations like the Muscular Dystrophy Campaign and *Trailblazers* have been a driving force behind that. But just because things have improved in certain areas, that doesn't mean that things are perfect. I still encounter difficulties with accessing smaller and older venues, though I recognise that it is difficult to make certain venues accessible because of the age, architecture or size of the building."

James Lee, London

"In certain venues they tell me I have to sit in a certain place, but I sometimes need to stand for a bit. The assumption is if you're disabled you need to sit, but for me, I like to stand and have the option of sitting so I can rest my feet for a bit. I actually hate sitting. Braehead Arena is great because they have seats on the tier that you can access but you can also stand behind if you wanted. Flexibility is needed for people with different conditions."

Catherine Gillies, Scotland

"Many venues do not release accessible tickets online, resulting in huge phone bills to purchase tickets. There should be passwords generated based on an accessible music card, such as the CEA card², which will allow only genuine users to book accessible tickets. There should be two tiers – one for mobility impaired and the other for wheelchair users. I think that venues used regularly for music, which are inaccessible, should either be made accessible or the venue changed. The access live music card would also audit facilities and ensure that venues are accessible and encourage better access when required."

Michaela Hollywood, Northern Ireland

² www.ceacard.co.uk/

Inclusive seating and viewing areas

- Nine out of ten of young disabled people said that more inclusive designs, that meant disabled people would be able to sit with more than just one friend or assistant, would make a big difference to their experience or watching live music.

Trailblazers' say.....

"Venues which have separate seating areas for disabled patrons should have a disabled toilet located near or within that area. Having to fight through a crowd in darkness just so I can get to the toilet is not fun, and potentially very dangerous. Some venues advertise themselves as being accessible, but really all this means is 'flat'. When gigs are standing room only it's impossible for a wheelchair user to see anything going on unless they are right at the front. My wheelchair raises up and I still find it difficult to see."

Zoë Hallam, Bristol

"At an arena I go to the wheelchair spaces are positioned behind the companion seats. This made it really difficult to attract their attention if I needed anything; we had to resort to texting each other in the end! I also felt quite isolated and as if I had gone to the gig on my own, hardly a social experience!"

Catherine Alexander, The Wirral

"Nine out of ten venues have separate wheelchair areas I call the 'disabled cage'! We are all supposed to sit together like one big happy family. For me it's not an issue, but it should be up to the individual to choose."

Sulaiman Khan, London

"I've been to a festival where they were reluctant to let my two cousins sit with me in the disabled seating area but eventually let us sit together only after we pleaded with them. This is a very fine line, however – at that same festival another year, one disabled person brought all his friends/carers with them, but it got to the point where there was barely any room for other disabled people and their friends in the area!"

Mathy Selvakumarn, East Midlands

"The rule that most venues have when it comes to companion seating is a constant issue when thinking of attending a live music event. It takes away the social element of going to a concert as you are only allowed to sit with one companion. If you have a significant disability this often means you have to sit with your carer and therefore some distance from any friends or family you have gone with. If this is changed it would make the experience of going to concerts much better."

Luke Baily, London

"I would love to go to festivals however I find that there are limited spaces available on the platforms. This means you can only have one or two people accompany you which defeats the purpose of going to festivals."

Nirav Shah, Nottingham

"You're only allowed one person with you in the allocated seating area so it's not much good if are with a group of friends. Also, there aren't enough wheelchair accessible tickets so once they have sold out, even though there may be other tickets available I cannot go to that show."

Christina, Wales

"It limits how many people you can take to a concert. You either have to choose between taking someone for medical needs or a friend, when ideally both options would be more favourable."

Hayleigh Barclay, Prestwick

"I have more than one friend so having only one person with me at a concert reduced the enjoyment."

Conor O'Kane, Portglenone

"I would often like my friends to be able to stay with me, but I would not expect a free ticket for them."

Ameena, London

Booking tickets

- 64% of young disabled people said booking tickets was the hardest thing about accessing live music
- 77% of young disabled people agreed that, "Booking tickets for a live music event as a young disabled person puts me at a substantial disadvantage compared to non disabled friends"
- 94% of young disabled people said that last minute ticketing websites such as Seatwave.com did not cater to disabled people
- 25% of young disabled people book using venues website currently, 83% would like to be able to be able to do this.
- 53% of people say they have either missed out on tickets or had a stressful experience because it is harder to book tickets for live music as a disabled person

Trailblazers' say.....

"I feel it's such a pain to book tickets at my local arena as you have to phone the main box office number, which means being on hold for ages, especially on ticket release days, and sticking to box office opening times. It would be so much easier to book online, as it's accessible at any time of day, and it's much easier for me to use the computer than struggle to hold a heavy phone. It's also hard to book at times when you want to go to an event with a large number of people. Most of the venues I go to limit the amount of companions you can have with you. "

Catherine Alexander, The Wirral

“When recently booking tickets for a gig it took at least 30 minutes on the phone as the member of staff didn't seem to know the venue's policy of companion tickets. They said the personal assistants had to have an official letter from the company they worked for. When I explained they were employed privately (this was a group booking for three people in wheelchairs and three companions), the member of staff said he would have to check with his manager. When returning to the phone, he said a letter was not needed and the fact we were in wheelchairs would be evidence enough!”

Hannah-Lou Blackall, King's Lynn

“Most venues ask you to ring up to buy accessible tickets, but a lot of the time there's no-one at the phone, or someone who doesn't know how the accessible ticket system works. This can be frustrating if you're trying to buy tickets for a high-demand event that sells out quickly!”

Mathy Selvakumaran, Worksop

“I hate talking on the phone and sometimes when phoning to book tickets I don't know how knowledgeable the person is on the other side of the phone. I don't really understand why things aren't online because some people will have communication difficulties and they want to be independent and be able to book tickets themselves and not rely on someone else to do it for them. I ask my mum to do it as I hate talking on the phone, I get nervous and my mum is more assertive.”

Catherine Gillies, Glasgow

“I've booked for gigs before where the disabled booking opens several hours after the standard booking does. When gigs are in high demand it's an unpleasant experience having to wait when all your friends have already confirmed their tickets.”

Zoë Hallam, Bristol

“With events that are highly in demand, the submission of evidence which is required for booking accessible tickets has meant that I've missed out on live music events in the past. Though there is usually an allocation of accessible tickets, the numbers are usually very small and if I miss out on that small number of tickets then I simply cannot go. While I recognise that the submission of evidence is necessary to prevent the exploitation of the tickets which have been allocated for customers with disabilities, I feel the system could be better. Perhaps there could be a central database shared by the major booking companies so that frequent customers would not have to keep on photocopying and posting their documents in. I don't know how practical that is but it's just an idea.”

James Lee, London

“You have to call a special hotline, you can be put on hold for over an hour just to be told they're sold out. Then if you really want to see it you have to go to a ticket seller who doesn't have any disabled tickets. It's very frustrating.”

Omar Foster, London

“If you could register as a disabled user and prove your documents at the start, then what is stopping you booking wheelchair seats online?”

Johnathon Byrne, East of England

Recent good and bad experiences

“Watching live music is an experience that no ipod or radio station can mimic. Being able to see your favourite artist perform in front of you is something that any music fan appreciates is the ultimate music experience. Also, being able to share that experience with friends is an important part of engaging with live music, which is something listening to an mp3 player with headphones is never going to produce. It is no wonder then that festivals as well as concerts are one of the most popular sociable past times. However, as many young disabled people, I’m sure, have experienced, it is yet another area in which one is made to feel like they are different. We all appreciate music in the same way and it is an industry, as a spectator anyway, that should treat every music fan the same.

“Sadly this is still not being achieved by live music venues and although minor changes are being made, there is still a general lack of consideration and thought being paid to the disabled customer. Of course it does vary hugely depending on the size and location of the venue and I suppose that we can forgive a historical venue for having limited facilities. What I can’t understand is, where new venues are being built or others being refurbished, they are still getting it wrong. It is not even necessarily that the physical access or the facilities aren’t up to scratch because most large arenas will have step-free access and accessible toilets but it is the assumption that the disabled customer will be ok with being much more restricted than the non-disabled customer.

“This restriction is built into the very design of concert venues these days as most accessible seating is placed in one area only. If you’re lucky there may be a second option but this often compromises the view of the stage. If you attend the O2 Arena in London, it’s a new build and one of the biggest and most popular venues; you have two choices of seating: one which is right at the front to the left of the stage, and the second which is further back around halfway up the tiered seating. Now I see where the designers were going with this as there is more than one choice and on initial view it appears to be fairly integrated and the O2 will give you a complimentary carer ticket. In their eyes they are ticking every box. However they really have missed one of the key features of the music experience and this is the ability to share it with friends. The O2 Arena has a cap on the number of companions that someone can have with them. For most gigs this is at two plus the wheelchair user. However for some concerts that are high demand you are only allowed to have one.

“I was fortunate to bag a Beyonce ticket for her O2 tour last week and was informed I could only have one person because they needed every space they could get. All right, this is fair in some sense, but it meant none of my family or friends could sit with me. The problem could be fixed if they had just built more accessible seating. I reluctantly accepted this situation, however once we were in our seats I noticed a party of four sat next to me. If the O2 Arena is going to have a rule, it really needs to be applied to everyone.

“Sadly, the O2 Arena in my experience is one of the better options for music venues but the companion issue is one that stretched across the board. In June, I am going to see Greenday perform at the Emirates Stadium, and after a complicated booking process in which I had to submit evidence that I was entitled to a wheelchair space, (my photo wasn’t enough), I finally booked two tickets. Just two; only one companion. I am going to

the concert with three friends. As a result of this, two of my friends are having to have general standing tickets and are not going to be allowed to be anywhere near me. It's hardly a sociable outing when you are nowhere near your friends.

"I really cannot see what the venues' reasons are for these seating restrictions; they may argue it's due to space constraints but sadly I think it's a lack of understanding and they are using building restrictions as an excuse. Maybe they just don't expect a disabled person to have more than one friend? In any case, things need to change. Last year I took part in a BBC Radio 1 documentary about disabled access to music called 'Let me into the music' but a year on there doesn't seem to be much improvement."

Maddy Rees, London

"I went to the Capital FM Summertime Ball at Wembley in June 2013. The booking process was fairly easy and I was able to get a free companion ticket, although we had to wait for confirmation of the tickets for 24 hours while a copy of my Disability Living Allowance letter was processed and confirmed my eligibility. The disabled viewing area was very good with a great view, although I would have had a problem if I had been going with more than one person as they were very strict with seating and other groups were split up. The only major problem we had was being told to wait at the end till it became less busy. This meant we would have been in jeopardy of missing our last train home but when we got past this the rest of the support out and to the Wembley tube station was superb."

Hannah Lou Blackall, King's Lynn

"I saw Cher Lloyd last March (2012) at the University of East Anglia and it was really good because the tickets were very reasonable. The disabled ticket-holders were let in before the regular ticket holders. The disabled viewing area was amongst the non-disabled standing area which made me feel 'normal'! It was a great experience!"

Laura Bizzey, East of England

"I went to see Madonna last year at Murrayfield Stadium and found the facilities appalling. The parking was over chipped stones which was a nightmare to get a wheelchair through. There was only one lift working and there was no-one to help open doors, and the sinks in the disabled toilets were not working."

Hayleigh Barclay, Prestwick

Hyde Park, London: Concert: Paul Simon, Arcade Fire

"Seeing a concert at Hyde Park is a great experience, especially in fine weather. For booking, it's done on the telephone which is a premium rate and often takes a long time to get through. However you're asked to send proof of needing a disabled ticket and you get a free companion ticket, which is good. There is parking available and shuttle buses to the venue, for those who need it. Organisation of the disabled platform is very good. It's separated for those who need seats and those who need wheelchair spaces. Charging stations are available for electric wheelchairs to charge if necessary. Wood chippings were placed down in the park, and paths were covered with matting or boards which made it easy to travel around the site. There were good disabled portable toilets too."

V festival, Staffordshire, Weston Park Year: '07, '08, '09, '10 and '12

"When we first started going to the festival, booking tickets wasn't great, they had to be booked through a dedicated telephone number for disabled festival-goers. Now it can be booked online through See Tickets and other ticket sellers. No proof of disability is needed and you can just email for disabled car parking passes. When turning up for the festival the parking is good. We've never camped as it's easier for us to stay at a hotel, but we know of others who've camped and say it's not bad. You go to disabled information by the campsite to get a wristband for your companions and you're entitled to one companion per disabled ticket. Once entering the site, with good weather the ground is not too bad. However when the weather is wet and muddy it's not great at all for wheelchair users. As the mud gets churned up it makes it difficult for manual and electric wheelchair users. There have never been wood chippings or mat coverings in all the years we've been going. If they had paths from each disabled platform with the special type of covering which also protects the grass, then it would make this more enjoyable for festival-goers. As often we've found we couldn't move as freely from each stage as others, for fear of getting stuck. In the most extreme weather, where the whole field is churned up, my wheelchair has been stuck in the mud. My wheelchair had to be forklifted out of the mud and it took about three hours in total to get my wheelchair out. I've also found that the disabled platforms aren't always well organised and could do with being just bigger. The disabled portable toilets weren't always great and not always cleaned out over the weekend."

Laura Merry, South East

"There is currently no viewing platform or allocated seating at the Cambridge Junction in the main venue at all. There seems to be no good reason as there is plenty of space."

"The Forum in London messed up my booking for disabled/carer tickets, and there was no record of my booking at the box office when attending venue on day of gig. They do have good viewing platform though."

"There was a good viewing platform and good accessible disabled camping area at Beautiful Days festival in Devon. They also sent me a special parking sticker which allowed access to alternate entrance/car park next to disabled camp area."

Trailblazer, South East

"Grand Opera House – I was sitting in my space and was asked to move out of the way. At the same time the member of staff was releasing my break and I shot down the slope into the row of chairs at the bottom and injured my neck. I dealt with it and got an apology eventually and assurance that it would not happen to anyone else."

Barbara Midrash, Northern Ireland

"I've been to Wembley Arena a couple of times. The seating was great and myself and four non-disabled friends got to sit together. The staff were helpful, access was simple and the gig itself was great."

Jon Hollowell, East Midlands

"I went to see The Levellers in the O2 ABC1 and I found that they had reserved stools for the rest of my family; it was an awesome feeling. I love that proactiveness and the fact that I could have the option of standing or sitting. It was brilliant. Also if you let

disabled people in early they can get the choice of standing areas too. Sometimes I stand at the side of the stage if I really want.

“At another gig I went to at the Scottish Exhibition and Conference Centre they had a portable metal disabled area which was even better because you could stand, sit or even walk down the ramp into the crowd and stand down there.

“At the Ivory Blacks I saw Death Angel and I stood at the front with the mosh pit behind me and crowd surfers but it was awesome. I was almost speared by some dude but I moved out the way in the nick of time. I also went to see REM at Glasgow Green. That was awesome. I would say finally, that they should make all disabled areas accessible to the standing areas because people in wheelchairs can still move around. If they want to leave and join the crowd for a bit, they should be able to.”

Catherine Gillies, Glasgow

Useful links

Attitude is Everything

www.attitudeiseverything.org.uk

Attitude is Everything improves deaf and disabled people's access to live music by working in partnership with audiences, artists and the music industry to implement a charter of best practice across the UK.

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