

The man who moves a mountain begins by moving small stones

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On November of 2013, the Disability and Inclusion Strategy was approved by the States of Guernsey.

At the heart of the strategy is the aim to improve the quality of life for disabled islanders, their families and carers and a drive to change the attitudes toward disabled people so that they may be engaged and active within the island community on all levels. In particular within the strategy, there is a commitment to introducing legislation that will protect disabled islanders from discrimination both in employment and in the community as a whole.

Why this needs to be done

The most recent (available) statistics from the UK indicate that 14% of the working age population in the UK are disabled persons. If we apply that to Guernsey, that would constitute roughly 5,500 people.

To ignore the needs of such a number of people and their carers is not only unreasonable, it is not sustainable in the long term for Guernsey. These individuals form part of a valuable resource that may be being under used due to outdated or prejudiced conceptions of the requirements of disabled persons.

What is meant by disability and how do you discriminate on that basis?

As defined by the United Nations Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities people with disabilities include those with: *"physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers, may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others"*

Discrimination on the basis of disability is quantified by any "distinction, exclusion or restriction on the basis of disability which has the purpose or effect of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal basis with others, of all human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field.

So this isn't just about not being able to get to the third floor to access the bathrooms, or indeed, bigger text on company leaflets. It is about changing our culture and attitude.

How this is to be done

The three key outcomes of the Strategy are:

1. Improving opportunities for disabled people and their carers to participate across society

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2. Promoting more positive and inclusive attitudes towards disability in the community
3. Challenging instances of disadvantage facing disabled islanders

Arguably, one of the key features, is the discrimination law will be protection. Those who are more vulnerable need a safety net that is accessible and relevant to all forms of disability

What this means – reasonable adjustments

Stereotypically, disability legislation has brought on an unrealistic reaction towards change. Typically smaller companies have been seen to be burdened with costs to meet the basic changes required such as wheel chair access. But the business community needs to understand that disability is so much more than a physical scenario and any change required, in most cases, may well be quite small.

So what constitutes Reasonable? The Guernsey Employment Trust (GET) has put together a Good Practice Guide for employers in Guernsey. Inclusive of this Guide is a snapshot of some of the small changes that businesses can consider when looking at changes to accommodate disabled staff. Some of these suggesting include:

- Allocating some duties to another person
- Altering the disabled person's working hours
- Modifying existing equipment
- Providing additional mentoring or assistance

With strong consultation and the support of the business community, Guernsey has a real opportunity to create a legislative framework that will support not only those marginalised on the basis of their disability, but all those pushed aside by reasons such as race, gender, marital status, religion or age.