UK DISABILITY HISTORY MONTH 2016
DISABILITY LANGUAGE AND
22 November– 22 December

UK DISABILITY HISTORY MONTH
– CELEBRATING OUR LIVES
– CHALLENGING DISABLISM
– ACHIEVING EQUALITY

UKDHM 2016 BROADSHEET: DISABILITY AND LANGUAGE

Who is Normal? Language and meaning, used over time to describe disabled people and our impairments, tells us much about social attitudes. Attitudes reflect and instigate the way disabled people are treated in society, affecting our identity and sense of human dignity. Impairment or loss of function has always been part of the human condition, whether caused by our genes, poor nutrition, disease, accidents, war or the stress of life. Throughout history, impairments have been attributed to magic, witchcraft, divine punishment, evil /sinning or chance. In the large majority of times and places, a disabled person has been viewed negatively. The mistreatment, stereotyping, negative attitudes and systematic discrimination are so widespread that we must view this disabilism as a humanly created oppression, on a level with racism, sexism, and homophobia. Disabled people are also part of these other oppressed groups and so inter-sectionality is important. Disabilism is more universal, because all human beings can either have or acquire

long term impairments. With a fear of long term impairment, similar to fear of death, there becomes a near universal denial of our experiences, creating barriers to inclusion. Living with a long-term impairment- sensory, physical, cognitive, psychosocial or a combination, places one in a minority compared to non-disabled people. As the comedian, writer and activist Francesca Martinez put it in her book 'What the **** is Normal?!
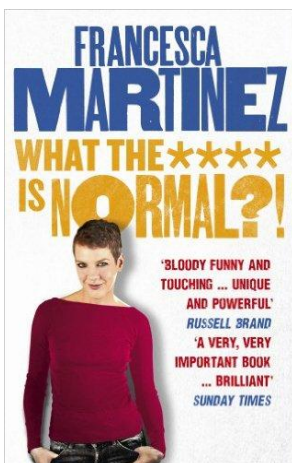
"What do you do when you're labelled abnormal in a world obsessed with normality? In a world where wrinkles are practically illegal, going bald is cause for mental breakdown, and women over size ten are encouraged to shoot themselves, what the ** do you do if you're, gasp... disabled?...Choosing to accept yourself is a political act. An act of liberation."**

Much of the media encourages young people to strive for a narrow and unrealistic 'perfect' look. This can lead to poor self-esteem, problems with body image and rejection of anyone who does not fit into this look. Martinez was referring to her life as a person with cerebral palsy. Francesca, after a few years of low

self esteem, having been happy and included in primary school, finally realised she had the power to stop judging herself by society's unhealthy standards and create her own. So she did. This powerful new perspective changed her life forever. Valuing and respecting difference, challenging those who seek to diminish our humanity is the key to eradicating the prejudice and harassment, which makes so many disabled people's lives a misery. In the process, disabled people who have reached a new understanding of themselves have much to teach the rest of the world.

Disabled Women Protest Dec. 1991   Credit Brenda Prince: Forum

December 1991 The Guardian uses the metaphor that Britannia is wrecked by the Maastricht Treaty negotiations. The response **'Women in Wheelchairs are strong the Guardian is Wrong'**.
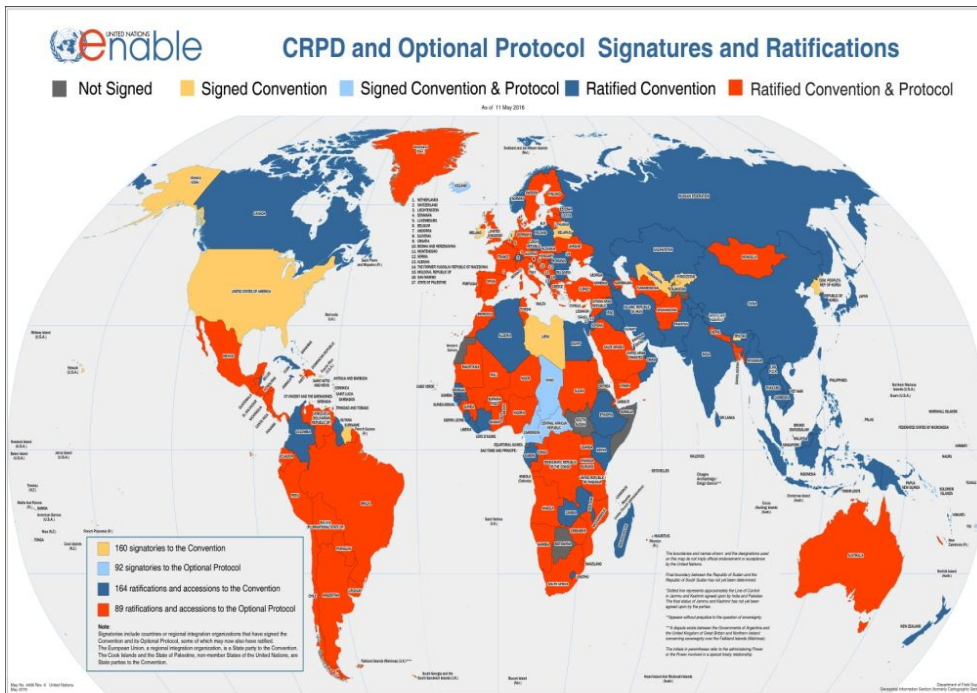
Changing the paradigm or focus

Over 5 years the United Nation (UN) constructed a legally enforceable human rights treaty, challenging widespread prejudice and discrimination against disabled people and ensuring we have the same access to universal human rights as non-disabled people. Unique among treaties was the involvement of disabled individuals and their representative organisations worldwide. **The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006, UNCRPD)** holds out the promise of finally dismantling disablism. The process of making the Convention was characterised by the watch words **'Nothing About Us Without Us'. Now the task is Implementation!**

The core of the UNCRPD shifts the focus from viewing persons with disabilities as 'objects' of charity, medical treatment and social protection, towards viewing us as 'subjects' with rights, capable of making decisions for our lives based on our free and informed consent, as well as being active members of society. **"'Disability is an evolving concept, and that disability results from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinder full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others"** Preamble UNCRPD now ratified by 168 countries including UK. 26 not yet ratified. http://www.un.org/disabilities/convention/conventionfull.shtml

Disabled people or people with disabilities?

In the UK we call ourselves '**disabled people'** because of the development of the **'social model of disability'.** In the C19th and C20th, a disabled person's medical condition was thought to be the root cause of their exclusion from society, an approach now referred to as the **'medical or individual model'** of disability. Social exclusion led to inadequate policies and legislation, inappropriate attitudes, stereotyped media image, inaccessible buildings and information. In the mid 1970s, a new way of thinking emerged

from the disabled people's civil rights movement, the **'social model of disability'** or 'barriers approach' (Union of Physically Impaired Against Segregation, 1976).This stated that disabled people are those with impairments who experience barriers within society. It redefined disability as pertaining to the disabling effect of society, rather than the functioning of our minds, bodies and senses,

by using the following definitions: a) Impairment is a physical, mental or sensory functional limitation within the individual b) Disability is the loss or limitation of opportunities to take part in the normal life of the community on an equal level with others due to physical and social barriers. Therefore the term 'disabled people' was redefined by the movement to mean **'people with impairments who are disabled by socially constructed barriers.'** This 'social model' definition was adopted in 1981 by Disabled People International and its meaning was incorporated into the UNCRPD. In the UK, **disabled people** are those with many different impairments-autism, deafness, blindness, bipolar, spinally injured, mental health issues, cerebral palsy, Down's syndrome etc. Challenging the barriers in society unites us. Claiming the label **Disabled Person** is an act of solidarity, being part of an oppressed minority, just as calling oneself a 'Black Woman', 'Jewish Man' or 'Lesbian Woman' are political and empowering labels. However, in other parts of the world, people first language had developed so '**persons with disabilities'** is still used throughout the UNCRPD.

People with disabilities For those who choose to call themselves this, disability is not separated from their impairment. They want to be seen as **people first**, as disability is seen as a within person problem. They do not wish to be defined/confined by their impairment. Although the oppressive and unequal treatment we are subjected to is viewed as a breach of our human rights, the clear transition to viewing disability as something rooted in society and other than our impairment has never occurred. Without an understanding of **'social model thinking'**, it is reasonable to see disability as negative and wish to distance oneself from it by, using **'people first'**. Some impairment groups, like those with autism, cannot separate themselves from the identity with their condition and so reject the 'people first' epithet, preferring Autistic People. **Deaf people** (with a capital D) view themselves as a cultural minority group and community, users of Sign Language and also reject people first language. However, people with **learning difficulties** or **learning disabilities**, as far back as the 1970s in Canada, rejected an imposed label such as **'mental handicapped'** and wanted to be known as **People First.** Language can diminish or empower and what is acceptable to various disabled people changes over time. When in doubt, ask the disabled people how they wish to be known.

Shakespeare and disability

"...I, that am **curtail'd** of this **fair proportion**,
 Cheated of feature by dissembling nature,
Deformed, unfinish'd, sent before my time
Into this breathing world, **scarce half made up**,
And that so **lamely** and unfashionable
That dogs bark at me as I **halt** by them;
Why, I, in this weak piping time of peace,
Have no delight to pass away the time,
Unless to spy my shadow in the sun
And **descant on mine own deformity**:
And therefore, since I cannot prove a lover,
To entertain these fair well-spoken days,
I am determined to prove a villain
And hate the idle pleasures of these days.
Plots have I laid, inductions dangerous,...."

Richard III' s portrait & skeleton genetically identified, shows no arm or leg impairment. A person with similar scoliosis in armour Ch.4

In William Shakespeare's "Richard III" Scene I, Act I, Gloucester makes perhaps the most famous speech about the impacts of impairment on character, reinforcing the link between evil and disability. This followed Sir Thomas Moore's much earlier account of the Life and Death of Richard III, which was written to curry favour with Henry VIII, who felt very insecure as King, because his father, Henry VII, killed Richard III in the battle of Bosworth, so usurping the crown. Moore embellished history and added to Richard's **'hunchback'** or scoliosis, (now proven with the recent discovery of his skeleton in a Leicestershire car park) a **'lame leg'** and '**withered arm'** (both made-up) and dubiously directly linked Richard to the murder of his

brother, the Princes in the Tower and several others, suiting Tudor propaganda. Shakespeare produced magnificent literature in Richard, who is contradictory, both an evil monster /murderer and a magnetic personality, attractive to women. A recent Channel 4 documentary showed how Richard would have worn a corset and specially designed armour, to be able to carry out the duties of a Knight. (http://www.channel4.com/programmes/richard-iii-the-king-in-the-car-park/on-demand)

Throughout history, human physical and mental differences have been described in language and meaning which is based on the thinking of the day, reinforcing powerful stereotypes, which stretch down the years and still influence thinking about disabled people.

Lame today is used by young people to mean *something that is boring or un-cool* from meaning *not smart or unimpressive*. In Shakespeare's time it meant both *having an injured foot/leg, make walking difficult* and *not strong , good or effective.* Other words coming from Latin *lamenta –weep and wail* or *lamia-witch*, giving us *lamentation, lament* and *lame-duck.* These words are negative. *Halt* was a word in common use, meaning the same as *lame*, as was *cripple* also meaning *to move slowly, to be permanently injured or have no power*. The polarity of good and evil, beautiful and unsightly is found right across all languages and is a major contributor to the devaluation of disabled people.

Today we find these words offensive, as we view ourselves as people with various impairments (loss of function) who face barriers in the environment, attitudes and organisation which do not accommodate us, **they disable** us. We struggle to remove these barriers so we can all be included. In Shakespeare's time, physical impairment was more common than today and would have been unremarkable. Generally, disabled people of that period would have had families, worked and not been distinguished from the mass of common people, unless severely impaired. Those not looked after by their community would have begged, though this became outlawed and the first Poor Law (1601) meant they had to stay in their local area and get some support from the parish. The impact of the play "Richard III" (1592) would have been dramatically stronger, at a time when people generally believed in witchcraft and tangible forces of evil. It made a powerful ink between **disability** and **evil**.

Eugenics and Mental Deficiency Act.

This year UKDHM has worked with the Open University and Access All Areas to produce an online pack around the film on the life of Mabel Cooper '**No Longer Shut Up'**. Mabel was placed in a long stay hospital for the 'mentally deficient' at the age of 3 weeks and stayed there more than 30 years. When eventually released under care in the community, she became a major advocate for

people with learning difficulties and a founder of People First National, UK. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BZAgOs4Ngn4. The online pack has developed activities for students from 9 to 18 year olds in English, drama, history, science, geography, maths and PHSE.

Stoke Park Colony outside Bristol, started with children and built up to 1500 'patients' in 1973.

Following Darwin's publication of *The Origin of Species* (1865), his cousin Frances Galton and many others thought they could speed up natural selection of human beings by stopping **'inferior'** people from having children. This Eugenics movement particularly focused on those they called **'feeble-minded',** who could pass as part of the general population, but who carried the characteristics of mental deficiency, crime, immorality and destitution, which could be passed onto to their children. Most people with more significant mental impairments or labels-**'the mad', 'idiots'** and **'imbeciles'** were already by this time kept in asylums and the workhouse, upper and middle class people in private small asylums. The Eugenicists such as Mary Dendy, worked ceaselessly in Manchester to separate the 'feeble minded' from other children and adults, placing them in the home she opened in Sandleridge, Cheshire. In 1902, the Rev. Harold Nelson Burden, chaplain at Horfield Prison, and Katharine his wife founded the National Institutions for Persons Requiring Care and Control to care for '**mentally retarded'** children and adults.

MARTIN KALLIKAK

He dallied with a feeble-minded tavern girl

He married a worthy Quakeress

She bore a son known as "Old Horror" who had ten children

She bore seven upright worthy children

From "Old Horror's" ten children came hundreds of the lowest types of human beings

From these seven worthy children came hundreds of the highest types of human beings
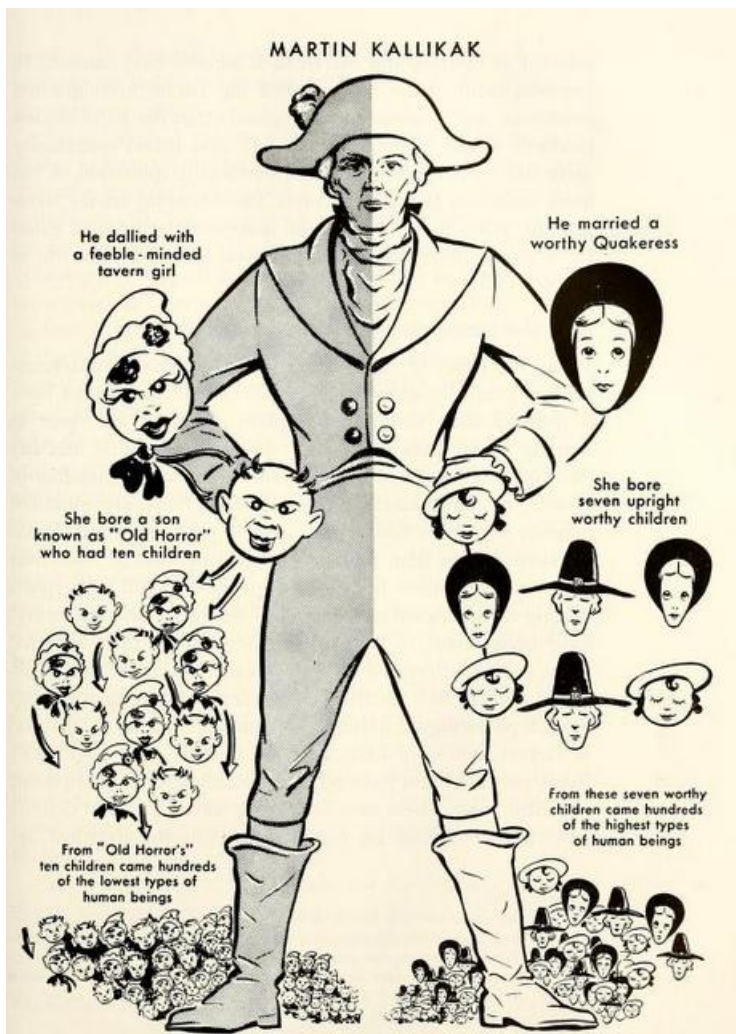
Eugenics –USA Goddard's-False Science on inheritance 'moral defectives' led to sterilisation and immigration. This was recycled by Hitler leading to T4 programme and death of up to 1 million disabled people.

They opened Stoke Park Colony in April 1909, the first institution certified as a home for 'mentally retarded' patients. The agitation and false thinking of Galton, Dendy, Burden, Ida Darwin and a small group of other Eugenicist activists led to a Royal Commission on Mental Deficiency which was provided with false scientific evidence by psychologists like Cyril Burt, with Intelligence tests and doctors like A.F.Tredgold, who provided the authoritative text on 'mental deficiency' for the next sixty years. More Eugenicist fear mongering led to the Mental Deficiency Act, 1913 voted through Parliament with only 2 votes against. This led to the licensing and shutting away for life of 130,000, and a growth industry in diagnosis and labelling, the setting up of over 100 large institutions, many of which only began to close in 1980s to 2000s and many of the children's facilities just changed their name to special school.
http://ukdhm.org/long-stay-mental-deficiency-hospitals-in-england-scotland-and-wales/

The 1913 Act established the **Board of Control for Lunacy and Mental Deficiency** to oversee the implementation of provisions for the care and management of four classes of people,

"a) *Idiots. Those so deeply defective as to be unable to guard themselves against common physical dangers. b) Imbeciles. Whose defectiveness does not amount to idiocy, but is so pronounced that they are incapable of managing themselves or their affairs, or in the case of children, of being taught to do so. c) Feeble-minded persons. Whose weakness does not amount to imbecility, yet who require care, supervision, or control, for their protection or for the protection of others, or, in the case of children, are incapable of receiving benefit from the instruction in ordinary schools. d) Moral Imbeciles. Displaying mental weakness coupled with strong vicious or criminal propensities, and on whom punishment has little or no deterrent effect."*

Some of these unacceptable words, are still in common use as harassing language, but most young people know nothing of this particularly nasty period of oppression. This year's UKDHM gives us all an excellent chance to challenge this. A range of online education resources examining the above period- http://www.open.ac.uk/health-and-social-care/research/shld/education-resources Resources for challenging disablist language based bullying, a major problem in schools and colleges -http://www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk/resources/disablist-bullying/disablism-in-class/ **People with all degrees of learning difficulty can be educated and included. Easy Read text, time, clear structures and support are needed.**

The origin of negative words associated with disability to be avoided. Use alternatives
Afflicted This implies that some higher being has cast a person down (*'affligere'* is Latin *for to knock down, to weaken*), or is causing them pain or suffering. **Use disabled person or (talking of specific impairment) person with...**

Cripple The word comes from Old English *crypel or creopel*, both related to the verb 'to creep'. These come from old (Middle) *German 'kripple'* meaning to be without power. The word is extremely offensive. **Use disabled person.**

Dumb or Dumbo a) Not to be able to speak. This has come to be seen as negative from the days when profoundly deaf people were thought of as stupid because non-deaf people did not understand their communication systems. **Use a) disabled person or person with a speech impairment b) person with learning difficulties or disabilities.**

Dwarf Through folklore and common usage, has negative connotations. **Use short person or short stature.**

Feeble-minded The word feeble comes from Old French meaning *'lacking strength'* and, before that, from Latin *flebilis,* which meant *'to be lamented'*. Its meaning was formalised in the Mental Deficiency Act 1913, indicating *not an extremely pronounced mental deficiency, but one still requiring care, supervision and control*. **Use person with learning difficulties.**

Freak Different. From ' Freak Show' when in the past people paid money to look and laugh at disabled people. **Use disabled person**.

Handicapped Having an imposed disadvantage. The word may have several origins:

a) horse races round the streets of Italian City States. The best riders had to ride one-handed, holding their hat in the other to make the race more equal

b) penitent sinners (often disabled people) in Europe who were forced into begging to survive and had to go to people 'cap in hand'

c) C17th game called 'cap i' hand'. Players showed they accepted or rejected a disputed object's valuation by bringing their hands either full or empty out of a cap in which forfeit money had been placed. This practice was used in C18th to show whether people agreed to a horse carrying extra weight in a race (i.e. deliberately giving it a disadvantage). Offensive. **Use disabled person.**

Who am I ??

maimed deformed vegetable stupid hop-a-long half-wit ROBOT
knock-knees clumsy Cripple looney lame E.S.N.
dim Spazzie Dummy Dull peg-leg
Scabby mole nutter Invalid Cretin Mutant grasshopper
P.L.D. cloth-ears Idiot Moron fitter mental
fatso helpless daft mongol
deviant wheelck thlid hook handicap dopey slow

Micheline Mason

Idiot Dates from C13th and comes from the Latin word *idiota, meaning 'ignorant person'.* Again, it featured in the Mental Deficiency Act 1913 (see Feebleminded), where it denoted someone who was so mentally deficient that they should be detained for the whole of their lives. Highly offensive**. Use person with learning difficulties.**

Imbecile From C16th century and originating from the Latin*, imbecillus,* meaning *'feeble'* (literally meant 'without support', originally used mainly in a physical sense). It was defined in the Mental Deficiency Act as someone incapable of managing their own affairs. Highly offensive. **Use person with learning difficulties.**

Invalid Literally means not valid, from Latin *'invalidus'*. In C17th it came to have a specific meaning, when referring to people as **infirm** or disabled. Offensive. **Use disabled person.**

Mental, nutter, mad or crazy Informal (slang) words for people with mental health issues. One in four people have a major bout of mental distress or become mental health system users. The vast majority are not dangerous. Offensive. **Use mental health system user or survivor.**

Mentally handicapped In the UK, over 130,000 people with learning difficulties were locked away in Mental Handicap Hospitals because tests showed they had low Intelligence Quotients (IQ). These tests have since been shown to be culturally biased and only to measure one small part of how the brain works. **They have chosen the name "people with learning difficulties" for themselves because they think that through education, which they have largely been denied, they can improve their situation.**

Mong /Mongolian Langdon Down was a doctor who worked at the London Hospital in Whitechapel in the 1860s. He noticed that around 1 in 800 babies were born with pronounced different features and capabilities. Their features reminded him of the Mongolian people. He postulated that there was a hierarchy of races (in descending order) - European, Asian, African and Mongols. Each was genetically

inferior to the group above them. This was a racist theory. Extremely offensive. **Use person with learning difficulty or person with Down's syndrome.**

Moron(ic), Greek, meaning *'foolish, dull, sluggish'*. Offensive. **Use person with learning difficulties.**

Raspberry ripple Cockney rhyming slang for 'cripple'. Offensive.

Retard Still in common use in the USA for people with learning difficulties; from *retarded* or *held back in development*. Offensive. On October 5, 2010, U.S. President Barack Obama signed bill S. 2781 into federal law. Rosa's Law removes the terms *"mental retardation"* and *"mentally retarded"* from Federal health, education and labour policy and replaces them with **individual or person with intellectual disabilities or learning difficulties.**

Spaz, spazzie or spastic People with cerebral palsy are subject to muscle spasms or spasticity. These offensive words used to describe or just as an insult. Use **people with cerebral palsy or disabled people.**

Stupid Used in America at the start of C20th *'scientifically' to denote 'one deficient in judgment and sense'.* Do not use.

The blind, The deaf, The disabled To call any group of people 'the' anything is to dehumanise them. **Use blind people, deaf people or disabled people.** Often our impairments are used as a metaphor. Statements like **"are you blind?"**, **"are you deaf?"**, **"that's lame"** all have connections to negative descriptions of disability and certainly aren't meant kindly.


Victim or sufferer Disabled people are not victims of their impairment. This implies they are consciously singled out for punishment by God or a higher being. Similarly with the word sufferer. **Use disabled person or person with chronic pain.**

Wheelchair-bound Wheelchair users see their wheelchair as a means of mobility and freedom, not something that restricts them, apart from problems with lack of access. **Use wheelchair user.**

Changing the language to words like **'differently able'** or **'special'** was thought to get rid of the stigma attached to negative language. As it is the disabled person who is stigmatised, changing the label does not change the behaviour. For this reason there is no mention of 'special' in the UNCRPD. Avoid these patronising euphemisms.

C18th Cartoon Culture. Political cartoonists, at a time when many did not read, often used a visual language to make satirical comment. Disability was regularly used to denote weakness and lack of power. Here in Hogarth's the Election Series- Polling Day, voters are shown declaring their support for the Whigs
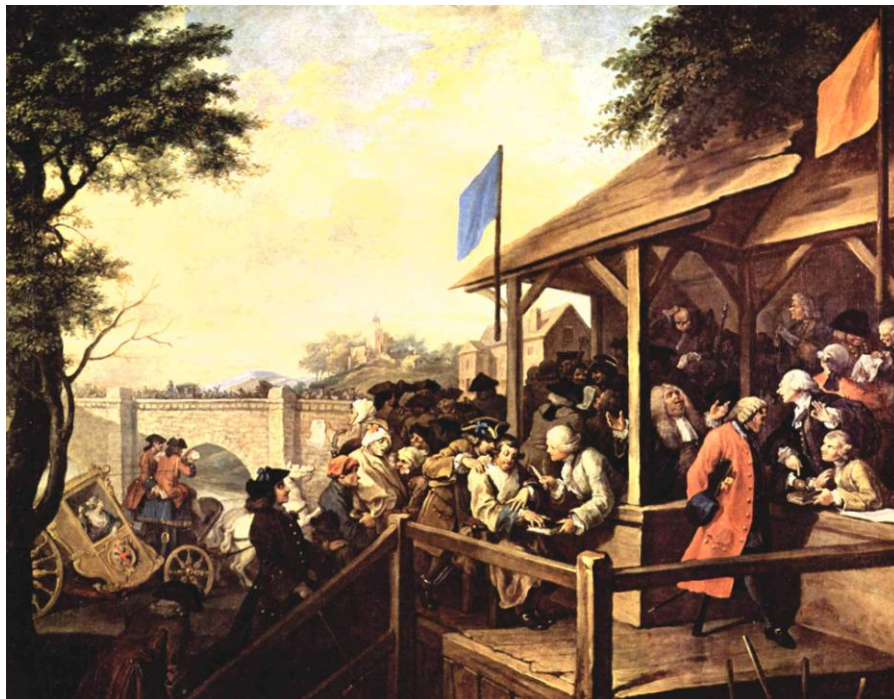
(orange) or Tories (blue). Agents from both sides use unscrupulous tactics to increase their votes or challenge opposing voters. A Whig voter with an **amputated hand** is being challenged because he is placing his **hook**, rather than his hand, as legally prescribed, on the Bible. The Tories are bringing a **mentally disabled** man to vote. A **dying man** is being carried in behind him. In the background a woman in a carriage with a broken axle stands for Britannia affronted. (See front page for 1991 use). Her coachmen are gambling, ignoring the fact that the carriage is broken.

## The Struggle for Communication Accommodations and Support

For some, their impairment prevents them using standard language. They need accommodations and support to learn and to access. There has always been a huge struggle for recognition of alternate communication.

Various touch tactile alphabets were developed for **blind people**. In C3rd Didymus, a blind Alexandrian scholar, invented a means of reading using carved wooden letters. John Milton, the poet and historian, wrote *Paradise Lost* (1667), when he was blind. The Enlightenment led to a philosophical debate. If sight was required to understand the essence of a thing, as Locke argued, then educating 'the blind' was a futile enterprise. If understanding was generated from within, as Berkeley correctly argued, there was no reason a blind person could not learn as well as a sighted person. This opened the way for blind education. Louise Braille developed the system of raised dots (1821) providing access to literature and now information technology. In C18th and early C19th the voices of blind people were not part of that debate. The advent of schools and institutes for blind people afforded an opportunity to organize as a group for their own interests and served as hothouses for the development of new devices and systems of writing. Self organisation led to the **Marrakesh Treaty** 2013, which lifts copyright on written material to be converted for 'Persons Who Are Blind, Visually Impaired, or Otherwise Print Disabled'. http://www.wipo.int/treaties/en/ip/marrakesh/summary_marrakesh.html

Deaf people were viewed as '**Dumb' or 'Crazy'** through much of history. In 1775, Abbe de L'Epee of Paris founded the first free school for Deaf people. He taught them to develop communication with gestures, hand **signs** and finger spelling. This was followed by a flowering of Deaf education. In 1881 in Milan, a Eugenicist inspired Conference was held banning the use of Sign, imposing an Oral method. Deaf children were not allowed to sign, having their hands tied as one of the punishments. Now BSL is a recognised language and the right to Sign is in the UNCRPD. Lack of funding for interpreters threatens this right with cuts in Access to Work. Beethoven wrote most of his music when deaf. Today GRAEAE Theatre have pioneered signing as an integral part of their performances.

Deafblind people have additional barriers. Laura Bridgman, a **deafblind** girl, entered Howe's School for the Blind in Boston in 1837. Howe wanted to prove that anyone could learn to read and write. He set out to teach Bridgman language through finger spelling and raised type. She gained fame internationally for her mastery of communication, with finger spelling and the written word. Helen Keller followed a similar route 50 years later, becoming much more famous for campaigning for disabled people, socialism and feminism. Haben Girma is a **deafblind** refugee from Eritrea and an internationally acclaimed accessibility leader, who has earned recognition as a White House 'Champion of Change' and BBC Women of Africa Hero. The first deafblind person to graduate from Harvard Law School, Haben champions equal access to information for disabled people. Catch her Ted Talk https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mvoj-ku8zk0
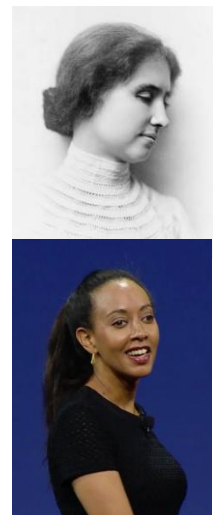
Those **without speech** have had particularly hard battles to find a voice through Facilitated Communication Training (FCT) " I am a man with no speech. I am a user of the pointing method of communication. I listen well and understand what is said… I am operating a perfectly weird body. I am wonderfully made..". See **Maresa McKeith's Poems for UKDHM and Quiet Riot.**

Communication should not be a barrier. Attitudes and negative language still are.
Everyone has a responsibility for bringing about change in themselves and others.
UKDHM is held 22nd November to 22nd December. We are happy for schools, colleges, trade unions, libraries, museums, DPOs, community and other organisations to publicise our theme and hold meetings or run activities at any time. www.ukdhm.org Let us know your events, email rlrieser@gmail.com