

YOUR STORY, OUR HISTORY

Six stories exploring the lives of people who have influenced disability laws and rights in the UK.

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You can find more stories of influential disabled people on the Power List 100, produced each year by Shaw Trust and available on their website.

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Contents

This resource contains stories of influential people who have impacted disability related UK laws and equal rights. Launched to mark Disability History Month 2020, this resource can be used throughout the academic year to embed the stories across the curriculum.

Ben Purse

Ben was an early trailblazer for disability rights, leading a march of blind people and people with visual impairments to Parliament in 1920, which led to an important new law.

Rosa May Billinghurst

Influential suffragette and wheelchair user, Rosa (May) played an important role in protests and action in the campaign for votes for women.

Lord Alf Morris

As an MP and member of the House of Lords, Alf became a strong disability rights ally after experiencing inequality first-hand when his father returned from the Great War unable to work due to his injuries.

Anne Begg MP

Motivated by the challenges she faced to become a teacher, Anne campaigned to become an MP in Parliament to fight for equal opportunities for all, becoming the first ever full-time wheelchair user in the House of Commons.

Baroness Jane Campbell

As a young girl, Jane found herself unfairly excluded from mainstream education and wanted to make sure no one was left out again, by first becoming a disability rights activist, and later a member of the House of Lords.

Deborah Williams

When Deborah, a performer and artist, established her own company to tell her stories, she became such a success that she was invited into Parliament to share her experience and skills with a select committee.

Activities

- What are equal rights?
- Including everyone, every time



JUSTICE
NOT
CHARITY

Ben Purse

(1874 – 1950)

Ben was born in 1874 in Salford. By the time he had turned thirteen, Ben had lost all of his sight.

He trained to become a piano tuner, using his hearing to make sure every note sounded just right. It was a very skilled job, but time and time again Ben was turned down for work. Ben felt that people weren't giving him a fair chance because of his disability.

Ben wanted to change people's opinions of blind people, and to prove that people with a disability could work just like everyone else.

He decided to bring together a big group of people who were blind or visually impaired, so they could work as a team to share their message.

He called this group The National League of the Blind.

Ben, alongside members of the League, thought that the best way to make real change was to go right to where big decisions are made and speak to Parliament. So, on the 5th of April 1920, Ben and hundreds of blind people and people with visual impairments began to march to London. They travelled from Newport, Manchester and Leeds.

The marchers carried signs to say they were fighting, 'For Justice Not Charity'. They blew whistles as they marched, so that people all along their journey would hear their message.

When they got to London they asked to meet with the Prime Minister, David Lloyd George. They called for equal rights to work and better working conditions for blind people. Ben took the role of the main speaker for the marchers, demanding change happened.

But did anyone listen?

Yes! Later that year a new, important law was made called The Blind Persons Act 1920. It is thought to be the first law in the world, that supported the working rights of people with a disability.

Ben and the people in his League are remembered for being early trailblazers in ensuring the equal rights of disabled people in the UK.

VOTES FOR WOMEN



Rosa May Billinghamurst

(1875 – 1953)

Rosa May Billinghamurst was born and raised in London in a family with nine children. As a child she chose to use her middle name, so from then on everyone called her May.

When she grew up, May wanted to help people in her local area. She volunteered to help people in a workhouse, where people with very little money and no place to live were sent. They had to work hard each day and lived together in cramped, dirty, noisy buildings.

In the time May was living, women weren't able to vote in general elections. This meant that they had no say over who ran the country and how decisions were made that affected their lives. May felt that without the right to vote it was impossible for her to influence the big changes she wanted to see.

May heard about a group of women working together to campaign for the vote. They called themselves The Women's Social and Political Union, or WSPU. The group, and others like them, became known as Suffragettes. May joined straight away and even set up her own local branch to help other women join the campaign.

At this time, there were very few ways to get your views heard, especially if you were a woman. The group held marches and events to raise awareness of the call for Votes for Women. Everyone, including Members of Parliament, knew about the campaign.

As a child, May had an illness called polio. This left her unable to walk, and she adapted a tricycle to use as a wheelchair. When May took part in marches she wanted to stand out. She decorated her wheelchair in brightly coloured flowers and ribbons in the WSPU colours of purple, white and green.

May would march with the women, handing out leaflets, calling out their messages and refusing to move on when she was asked.

It wasn't easy fighting for what she believed in, and May was even put in prison. But after being released, she continued to protest. At one event she chained her wheelchair to railings outside Buckingham Palace to show she would never give up.

The campaign for Votes for Women lasted for many years, but finally a new law was passed. The Representation of the People Act (1918) gave some women the vote for the very first time. We have May, and women like her, to thank for this important step in equal rights for all.



Alf Morris

(1928 – 2012)

Alf Morris was born in Manchester in 1928. His father fought in the army during World War I and was badly injured, losing a leg and much of his eyesight. When he returned home from war, he couldn't work like he had before. This left Alf's family without much money, and they struggled to keep their house warm and have good food to eat.

Alf's mum wrote to her local MP to ask for help. MPs are the people elected to represent each area of the country in the House of Commons. Alf's mum was very happy when her MP helped them to get the support they needed.

This was something Alf never forgot. When he grew up, he decided he wanted to become an MP himself. Although Alf didn't win the first election he took part in, he didn't give up. In 1964 he was elected as the MP for Whythenshawe in Manchester.

Alf remembered what life was like for his family after his father had been injured during the war. He felt strongly that people with disabilities and their families should always be treated fairly, included in everyday life and have support if they needed it.

In 1970, Alf had a brilliant idea. He thought that a new law should be made to protect the rights of people with disabilities and long-term illnesses. He called it the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970.

Alf stood up in the House of Commons to explain why it was important that people with disabilities were treated fairly and equally. The other MPs listened, asked questions and agreed with Alf's idea. It went through lots of different steps in Parliament, but eventually Alf's idea became a law.

It was the first law anywhere in the world that said people with disabilities should not be treated unfairly by others.

In 1974, he became the world's first Minister for Disabled People, which meant he could spend more time listening to the views of disabled people and making sure the UK laws protected everyone's right to be included fully in everyday life.

In 1997, Alf's hard work for disability rights led to him becoming a member of the House of Lords in UK Parliament. Here he continued to speak up for equality.

Alf will always be remembered for being a strong ally for disabled people, listening to people's views, representing them in UK Parliament and making change happen.



Anne Begg

(b. 1955)

Anne was born in 1955 in Scotland. From a young age she loved reading and writing, and wanted to become an English teacher.

After she left school, Anne applied to join a college to do her teacher training. But the college told her she couldn't join.

Anne was born with a rare condition that weakened her bones, so she used walking sticks to help her get around. The college thought that because she used walking sticks, she wouldn't be able to teach full time. But Anne knew differently. She was sure that she could do it, so she applied again, and again until eventually she was allowed to join.

Anne became a brilliant teacher. It was a job she really loved.

In her thirties, Anne began to use a wheelchair. She found that her wheelchair gave her more freedom to do what she wanted. She called it her 'liberator'.

Anne's experience gave her a passion for making sure that everyone, including disabled people, could be included fully in everyday life. She wondered if there was a way she could do more to make this happen.

Anne knew that big, important issues were debated in UK Parliament, and it was in Parliament that MPs made decisions that affected everyone in the UK. She wondered if that was the place for her.

In 1997 Anne made a big decision to leave the job she loved and stand in the general election. This is when adults in the UK vote for people to represent them in the House of Commons. Anne wanted to represent her local area, Aberdeen South, in Scotland. She knew she'd need a lot of votes, and was nervous when the results were announced. But... she won!

When she became an MP, Anne spoke powerfully for all the people where she lived. She also debated lots of important topics; from disability rights to pensions.

Anne was able to bring her experience and skills to help make laws better and to give different points of view in important debates. She was also the first full-time wheelchair user to be elected as an MP to the House of Commons.

There is still work to do to make sure UK Parliament represents everyone, but Anne's story shows how important it is to make sure everyone is included.

DISABILITY
RIGHTS
NOW



Jane Campbell

(b. 1959)

Jane was born in 1959. As a child she loved playing games, reading books and watching her favourite TV programmes with her sister. Jane was born with condition that weakens her muscles and she used a wheelchair to get around.

When it was time to start school, Jane was told that she couldn't go to the same school as her friends and sister. She was taken to a different school, with other children with disabilities. This school didn't teach the same lessons and she quickly became bored and frustrated. She felt it was unfair that she couldn't go to the same school and learn the same things as everyone else.

When she was sixteen years old, she joined a brilliant college and worked hard on challenging subjects. She left with top marks in her exams and was excited to see what the future held for her. Jane applied for lots of jobs and knew that she could do whatever she put her mind to.

But she found getting a job really hard. People wouldn't give her a chance, simply because of her disability. She felt she had no way to fight against this unfair treatment. Luckily, Jane met a group of other disabled people who also wanted to see things change. They shared their stories with each other and decided they would stand up to unfair treatment together.

They wanted to make sure that people listened to them, so they made up brilliant slogans to make people think, like 'Nothing about us without us!'. They wanted people to know that decisions that impacted disabled people must be made with disabled people. They even stood together right outside Parliament in London to protest and make sure their voices were heard.

Finally people started to listen, and Jane got a job helping people make decisions about services for people with disabilities. Jane wanted to make sure other people didn't experience what she had growing up. And, along with others, she pushed for new laws. These would make sure that children with disabilities could go to the same schools as their friends, and that jobs must be open to all. Today, the law says that everyone needs to play their part in making sure disabled people are included in everyday life.

In 2007 Jane was invited to join the House of Lords to mark just how much she had done for disability rights. Now she wasn't outside UK Parliament protesting, but was inside sharing her views, ideas and knowledge. Today, Jane brings her skills and experience to look at laws in detail and make sure they get even better for disabled people, and for everyone.



Deborah Williams

(b. 1969)

From a young age, Deborah had loads of brilliant, creative ideas. She wanted to make art, to be on the stage and to perform.

When she left school, Deborah went to interviews and auditions to begin her career. She found that she was turned down time and time again and she wasn't sure why.

But Deborah didn't give up. Instead she decided to be her own boss! She set up her own company and wrote her own plays. She wanted to tell stories about her experience. See Deborah didn't have a left hand so was a Black woman and a disabled person and she could see that these stories weren't being told anywhere else.

Deborah sold lots and lots of tickets for her plays, and she toured the UK and other countries.

Deborah knew then that the reason she had been turned down before wasn't because she wasn't good enough, it was because the big theatres couldn't see how to include her and her stories. But when she made shows herself, they were a hit!

Deborah's success got others thinking, and she was asked to share what she had learnt with the big theatres who had once not taken a chance on her.

Then she moved onto film and TV companies too. She helped them to make changes in front of and behind the camera to include more disabled people and people from all different groups and communities. This way they could tell stories for everyone.

UK Parliament heard about the work Deborah was doing. They invited her to give evidence at a committee made up of MPs and Members of the House of Lords. The committee was investigating how the arts could include more people.

Deborah shared her experience and ideas. The committee listened to Deborah and others to make a report with lots of advice and recommendations for the government and arts organisations to make sure theatre and the arts is open to all.

Deborah was able to use her experience to make a real difference to plans for the future, and she continues to speak up to make sure the arts is made by, for and about everyone.

Activities

What are equal rights?

The stories in this resource can be used to discuss **fairness, inclusivity and equal rights** throughout the year and are an ideal accompaniment for **Disability History Month** activities.

Themes:

Disability History Month, inclusivity, fairness, equality and rights

Curriculum areas:

Citizenship, British Values, PDMU, Social Wellbeing, History

Share a story

Read one of the stories from this pack to the class and share the image.

Reflect

Equal rights means making sure we all have the opportunity to be included equally in everyday life. This can mean doing things differently for different people so that everyone has an equal opportunity to join in.

Use these questions to help pupils think about the person in the story and what their actions mean for equal rights for disabled people.

- Can you remember who was treated unequally (or unfairly) in the story? Why do you think people treated them differently?
- How did the person in the story stand up to the treatment they saw or experienced? (remind pupils of the action the person took).
- When people stand up to unfair treatment it can be scary, and they may need to be brave. Why do you think that might be? (prompts include: being worried others won't agree or being unsure how standing up will impact you).
- Have you ever been treated unfairly or left out? What did it feel like?
- Or perhaps you have seen someone else being treated unfairly or left out? What did you do, or what could you do in the future?

Everyone can make a difference

It can take people standing up to unfair treatment to make change happen. But we all have a role to play in making sure we treat others equally. This can mean making changes – that are also known as 'adjustments' – to include everyone.

Get creative

Write a story either from your own life, or from your imagination about someone who stands up to unfair treatment – they may have been left out of a game or activity, or were turned away from something they wanted to do. How were they treated, what did they do and what could be changed to include them?

Including everybody, every time

In this activity pupils will think about what changes – or ‘adjustments’ – we can make to make sure everyone has an equal opportunity to be included in everyday life. They can often be very small changes that make a big difference.

The students will need to think of ways to make adjustments to a game so that it is accessible and inclusive for participants with different abilities and difficulties.

Remember: encourage the class to talk about the new participants using the character names on the card, not by their disability type.

Different people choose to describe their disabilities in different ways so encourage your pupils to ask people how they want to be described, because it’s up to them to decide.

Share a story

Share a story from this pack. You can use the prompt questions from the ‘What are equal rights?’ activity to discuss what happens in the story.

Introduce inclusivity

It’s very important that we make sure we include everybody in everyday life. This is called being ‘inclusive’.

It means looking at what we do and how we do it and making changes if needed to make sure that everyone can take part.

Have fun playing different games and thinking about how to make small changes to the rules to ensure everyone can be included.

Set the challenge

Play a game in a small group (there are two in this pack, but you could take any game). Each game should take approximately ten minutes to play.

Now give each group a stickman character, introducing them by name. This new participant is joining the game and you have asked them to introduce themselves and to share what they may need to take part in the game. One team member can read out the card.

Each team must adapt and rewrite the rules of their game to ensure the person in their stick man drawing can be included fully in the game. Give the groups around ten minutes to discuss what changes they will make and to rewrite the rules to include their adjustments. Come back together to share what each group has learnt.

The following two games have been based on the NHS ‘10 Minute Shake Up Games’ from Change 4 Life. Find more 10-minute games at: www.nhs.uk/10-minute-shake-up/

What adjustments might you consider?

- How could you communicate the rules so everyone knows what to do?
- Do you need to alter how/if you move in the game?
- Might some roles in the game change and others stay the same?
- Can you add, take away or change a sound-based, visual or physical part of the game to ensure everyone can take part?

Game 1: Monster scares

Read these instructions out loud to the group.

1. Choose one person to be a 'monster' – their goal is to try to catch one of the other members of the group.
2. The 'monster' must stand with their back against a wall, everyone else must stand with their backs against the opposite wall.
3. The group must chant, 'We're not scared!' over and over.
4. When the 'monster' is ready, they must run towards the group doing their best scary monster impression. The group must run forward, trying not to be caught. They are only safe when they reach the opposite wall.
5. If you are caught by the 'monster' you become the monster for the next round. This can be more than one person.
6. Play the game until everyone has had a go at being the monster.

Game 2: Find the ball

Read these instructions out loud to the group.

1. One person must hide the ball while everyone else closes their eyes.
2. When the ball has been hidden, the hider must call out, 'Find the ball'.
3. The other people in the group must now look for the ball and bring it back to the hider.
4. Now swap until everyone has had a chance to hide the ball.
5. The overall winner is the person who brings the ball back the most.

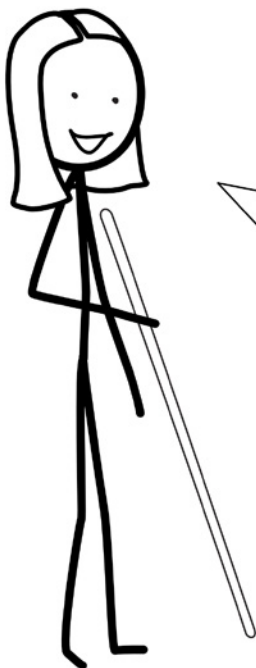
Stick Man Participant Cards

We asked Mia what we needed to know about her.



"I use a wheelchair. My wheelchair can't go up steps and I might need more room to get around."

We asked Alex what we needed to know about her.



"I have a visual impairment. I can see a bit but not enough to see where I'm going. I use a white cane, and it helps if you let me know where important things are."

Stick Man Participant Cards



We asked Suki what we needed to know about them.

"I am deaf. I lip read so I need to see your mouth to be able to understand you."



We asked Jackson what we needed to know about him.

"I am autistic. Making eye contact and having people touch me or get too close makes me uncomfortable."

