

Newsletter issue 17 July 2008

[www.forwardmid.org.uk](http://www.forwardmid.org.uk)

# FORWARD MIDLOTHIAN DISABLED



## Public transport: A trip without disasters

Over the last five years we at Forward MID have been tackling public transport issues for physically disabled people. More and more services are claiming to be Disabled friendly.

Lets have a look at the law first, it states The majority of wheelchair users will be able to travel on public transport. But, you may find that you can't if: your chair exceeds 700mm wide or 1200 long, your chair is too heavy, or you need to travel with your legs fully extended or your backrest reclined, it is your responsibility to maintain your wheelchair so that it is safe to travel, the transport operator can decline carriage if the wheelchair is not safe. We recommend that you have the size of your wheelchair, and the combined weight of both the chair and yourself marked fixed onto each wheelchair.

### Getting on and off

Buses should have ramp for town buses and intercity buses should have a lift, it is best to check on longer journeys in case they need set up and reserve the space for a wheelchair user. Trains have manual ramps at stations, however not all stations are manned so check this before setting off as you may not be able to get off at the end of your journey. Taxis, a door to door service, generally have manual ramps, please do not approach a taxi on an incline as it is impossible for the driver to get you aboard the taxi, Ask the driver to come to a flat area first. Trams and light rapid transport have level access and are

easy to access, however underground trains will most likely not have access to platforms so please check with operator both ends of journey and get it in writing. Yes I have been stuck in London underground to do a round trip.

### Now you are on

On buses it might take a little manoeuvring to get into the right space, you either face forwards or rearwards with the brakes on normally there are grab handles to hold on to. In a taxi or a high floor bus you must be secured with the vehicle restraining system, there should also be a seat belt. On trains, trams and light rapid transit you do not have to be secured as there generally more space to manoeuvre, but please do not block gangways. Never ever travel sideways. It is not safe.

Public transport companies have invested time and money in making their vehicles and services accessible. They want you as their customers! Remember you can try before travelling at a quite time.

We are asking disabled people who use public transport to help us in a study in Midlothian, to get an insight into how good or bad the public transport is. What we would like you to do is keep a very simple log book of your journeys and return them to forward MID. Interested in helping please phone Eric Johnstone on 0131-663-9471 or E-mail Iain at [forwardmid@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:forwardmid@tiscali.co.uk) for more information.



## Employment Support Allowance

Disability groups have condemned new rates for benefits which, they say, will leave many disabled people up to £400 worse off.

They claim the government has reneged on its promise that the new employment and support allowance would be higher than the current level of income support and have called for an urgent review of the proposals.

In March the government announced the rates for the Employment Support Allowance, as regulations finalising plans to replace incapacity benefits were laid in parliament. From October 2008 all new and repeat claimants will undergo a work capability assessment for Employment Support Allowance entitlement.

On announcing the rates, secretary of state for work and pensions James Purnell said: 'Employment Support Allowance will give more financial support to the poorest, most disabled people in society whilst extending the opportunity of employment to all those who can work.'

But disability groups argue that many claimants will lose out during the assessment phase, which carries lower payments, and through the loss of



additions for age and spouses.

Those assessed as able to work will be placed in a 'work-related activity group'. They will receive £84.50 a week Employment Support Allowance after 13 weeks and are required to go through a scheme to overcome potential barriers to work. Under income support they get £86.35.

Those identified as unable to work will come under the 'Support Group'. They will receive between £89.50 to £102.10, for the most severely disabled, compared with a top rate of £102.25 under income support.

Child Poverty Action Group's head of policy Paul Dornan said: 'Ministers gave their word in parliament that the new benefit would be higher. Pinning back the headline rate to the current level may leave them technically in the right, but morally in the wrong.'

To read what the government have said copy this url into a search engine: [www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm/200506/cmselect/cmworpen/616/61607.htm](http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm/200506/cmselect/cmworpen/616/61607.htm)

People Already claiming incapacity benefit will not be affected.

Every newsletter we will bring you summary of key areas that Forward Mid are involved -

A summary of key areas discussed at our June meeting.

- ▶ Developing a response to the Midlothian Community Hospital consultation.
- ▶ Developing an action plan for 2008-2009 to challenge transport issues for disabled people.
- ▶ Working in partnership with Midlothian Council Travel Team to provide more useful transport information for disabled people in Midlothian.
- ▶ G. P. visit program to Midlothian practices to discuss physical access and equalities issues.
- ▶ New diary to monitor and evaluate quality of service of public transport for disabled people.
- ▶ Running community taster sessions including gentle relaxation, massage, writing and talking group.

## Easy Does It!

A new inclusive group of people in the Mayfield easthouses area ran a seven week course of taster sessions in the community at Lawfield school.

The group was supported by Midlothian Voluntary action, local area co-ordinators and learning development.

The sessions led by Sheila Peaston of Roslyn therapies included relaxation, stress busting techniques, reflexology, positive thinking, healthy eating, massage and an outing to the Lady Victoria mining museum, Newtongrange and lunch at the Dalkeith country park.

For most of the members it was their first experience of involvement in this type of group, which is having the most positive effect on their health and well being.

The feedback from the group is very

positive. Below are few examples;

"Everyone made me feel welcome and the classes cheered me up"

"I've made new friends "

"It was very good for me"

"I learned things I've not heard before"

"Everyone is very friendly and I enjoy coming"

"A great bunch of people who shared a lot of fun"



"Socialising with other people with a cup of tea or coffee and a biscuit is excellent"

We are already planning the provisions for more of these sessions in the very near future. We hope to start again in August, Interested to come and see what were all about. For more information for where and when please contact Eric on 0131-663-9471.

## Independent Living for Disabled People

A new long term approach to help improve the daily lives of disabled people, backed by £600,000 from the Scottish Government, was announced on the 24th of June.

Communities Minister Stewart Maxwell promised to ensure that disabled people would feel valued as individuals and have the same choice, control and freedom as any citizen.

The Government and public sector bodies will work together to identify ways to break down the barriers which stop disabled people fulfilling their full potential in areas such as housing, transport, employment and education.

An expert group, including disabled people, will meet by the end of the summer to help shape the way forward.

Mr. Maxwell said:

"The Scottish Government believes that disabled people should be valued as individuals, be able to fulfil their potential as active citizens, and have control over their lives and decisions.

"We have already made a great deal of progress in enabling more disabled people to participate and engage fully in society.

"We recognise that independent living, in its fullest sense, is still out of reach for some. Working in partnership with disabled people and other public bodies, the approach I am setting out today will help us to determine what we need to do to deliver long term change for disabled people across Scotland."







## De Profundis and the gentle art of recovery

(De Profundis- Out of the depth)

"Out of the depths, have I cried to thee, O Lord,  
Lord, hear my voice,  
And let thine ears be attentive  
To the voice of my supplication."

Out of a deep dark hole, scrambling across the shale,  
Tripping and falling, slipping and sliding,  
Grasping and gripping, pulling oneself up and upwards,  
And there, so faint, but definitely there,  
Some kind of light-.

A star? A lamp? A reflection?  
Who cares...? But some kind of light!

And gently, but oh so surely, the darkness begins to recede,  
The mist and fog evaporate,  
A golden ball of sun emerges from behind a long dark cloud-  
Hands, shielding eyes against the unaccustomed glare,  
A long forgotten feeling seeping through the icy skin and  
frozen marrow.

Heat wonderful, radiant, glorious heat,  
Melting away years of indifference and chemical depression.

The film across your vision dissolves,  
The cover of the signposts come down,  
Some kind of path reveals itself,  
Some kind of knowledge of who I am,  
And what I might be doing here.

"It will take time" they said, "that suits me fine" I said,  
A chance to enjoy the wonder of recovery,  
Of discovery and re-discovery, of identity, a shedding of old  
Skins, of old why's a blank page, and some kind of control,  
A chance to say "This is who I am, welcome to the new day.

This poem by James McGill came to Forward MID on the 14 April 2008.  
Anyone who has had a medical operation or a chronic illness will relate to this poem.

### Alternative Publications

The editions of the Forward MID newsletters are available in large print or at [www.forwardmid.org.uk](http://www.forwardmid.org.uk)  
For alternative publication please E-mail to [eric.johnstone@mvacva.org.uk](mailto:eric.johnstone@mvacva.org.uk) or call Eric Johnstone on  
0131-663-9471 or write to him at MVA 4-6 White Hart Street, Dalkeith EH22 1AE with your request.