

Equalities Participation Network – 29 August 2024

Present: Myshele Haywood (GREC), Shola Ajide (Fountain of Love Church), Matt Carter (ACHSCP), Roslynn & Lesley Ann Fowler (Aberdeen Action on Disability), Linzi Harrow (ACC), Ross Mackay (GREC), Baldeep McGarry (ACC), Ells Mchaffie & Alfie & Blossom (Guide Dogs), Marion McLaughlin (Aurora Autism Consulting), Hussein Patwa (DEP and SATA), Karen Quinn (ACC), Mary Rasmussen & Smithy (Guide Dogs), Allison Wilkie (Deafblind Scotland), Erin Burton & Anne Esangbedo & Santanah Eshitoli (GREC/Social Workers in Training).

Apologies: Fay Morrison, Carol Hannaford, Judi Uhuegbu, John Whitfield.

Scottish Accessible Transport Alliance (SATA) – Hussein

Hussein's background:

- Experience of visual impairment and chronic pain.
- Used to work with the Scottish Government on accessible travel, and these days he mostly does volunteer work.
- This includes co-chairing the Disability Equity Partnership since 2021, working with NHS Grampian and the Regional Joint Board, and working on the National Action Plan on Human Rights.

About SATA – history and current status:

- SATA was founded 25-30 years ago, campaigning for accessible travel across Scotland.
- At its peak, it had up to 80 members.
- Looked at bus design, railway station architecture, accessible taxis, etc.
- SATA trustees represented disabled people individually.
- Hussein got involved in 2012 for a few years, and was invited back during Covid to try to help increase membership.
- Only around ten people attended the most recent Extraordinary General Meeting, discussing plans to wind up the organisation – not enough people to keep it going.
- SATA's Constitution requires agreement on where remaining funds should go – so far no agreement, another meeting coming up to discuss.

Can other organisations take on SATA's work? (short answer: not really)

- SATA is currently the only national charity that exclusively represents disabled people.
- Transport Scotland is not responsible for local accessibility issues – and local disability groups are not responsible for national strategic issues.
- The Scottish Government does consultations when they work on big projects. Sometimes accessibility is outsourced to other organisations.
- Disability Equity Partnership (formerly Disability Advisory Group, or DAG) – mostly works on local issues with ACC properties, also links between bus and rail services, toilets, etc.
- It's a struggle to deal with accessibility issues with private companies because of how DEP is set up – SATA was not limited to public services.

Q&A and Discussion

DEP and Representation and History

- **Marion** asked whether there is good representation of autistic or neurodivergent people at DEP. **Hussein** said that neurodiversity and mental health disabilities are underrepresented. **Baldeep** explained that recruitment is ongoing, looking for people who represent organisations rather than individuals. Also it's important to find active members. There's been a problem in the past where people sign up but then don't do anything.
- **Shola** asked whether DEP members need to be disabled. Can they be 'champions' to support disabled people? He suggested considering inviting young people to get involved – they are passionate, can make Tiktok videos, etc. **Hussein** agreed that the work needs to be a collective effort – 'one person does not a charity make.' There needs to be a leadership structure, but all voices are welcome at DEP. Currently all members are either disabled or have experience with caring for disabled people.
- **Roslyn** noted that AAD chair Stan Flett was on SATA, and was upset that all the work they've done is winding up. She explained that everyone on DAG had a disability. In the change to DEP, a lot of folk were not invited join the new group, possibly because of interpersonal issues. To join DEP, an interview is required.
- **Mary** was on DEP and noted there are still issues unresolved after several years – for example, lack of crossing lights by Marischal College and wrong tactile on the Green. Councillors were taken to see the problems on the Green, areas where there's not enough space to walk and taxis can't see pedestrians. One counsellor almost got hit by a car. But they've not done anything to address the problems.
- **Roslynn** emphasised that more representatives are needed on DEP.
- **Mary** explained that they don't need people to sit around the table – they need people who will visit stations, speak to taxi drivers' union, etc. Education is really important.
- **Hussein and Baldeep** agreed to have a conversation about possibly changing DEP terms of reference.

Ongoing Work to Resolve Issues

- **Baldeep** noted that ACC is in the process of rejuvenating the Green, including replacing tactile. ACC are also working on commissioning training for taxi drivers. In Glasgow, every taxi driver gets training about how to help people with disabilities.
- **Marion** was concerned about who will give the training.
- **Hussein** explained that ACC are looking at what worked in Glasgow, and DEP will be involved in the commissioning process. The training will probably mostly online, due to drivers' different schedules – important to get buy-in from drivers, rather than making it adversarial.

Access Panel and role for EPN

- **Baldeep** explained there have been several unsuccessful attempts to set up an access panel – there's a lot of historical baggage. Maybe need to develop something new.

- **Mary** noted that ACC bought into websites, etc to report access issues, but the licenses on these have expired. Where do people report issues now?
- **Baldeep** asked whether EPN wants to have a session with the national organisation that sets up Access Panels? Or could another group take this on? Could AAD do it?
- **Roslyn** explained that AAD is run by only four people – they would need more people.
- **Hussein** asked why previous attempts failed. Were they advertising in the wrong channels? Just repeating the same method is likely to fail again.
- **Baldeep** emphasised the kind of historical baggage that Roslynn was talking about, also that everyone is overstretched with limited resources.
- **Shola** suggested that EPN works as a pressure group to ensure the situation doesn't continue. In particular there needs to be a way to report issues.
- **Marion** suggested getting autistic people involved – they tend to be very focused and energetic, but often feel they don't have control over their lives. Being on panels etc gives them more sense of control.
- **Mary** noted that while it's great for young people to be involved, they are still likely to get tired and give up – it can be very frustrating to work so hard and see nothing change.

Other Issues

- **Shola** asked whether there is training for how to become a Councillor for people who are deaf, blind, etc? **Baldeep** said they are trying to recruit and prepare people. **Myshale** noted there are lots of other ways to be involved with the decision making process that aren't being an elected official.
- To raise another issue, **Hussein** noted there's not enough information about how to take things beyond the council, for example to push for a judicial review, which can be complicated and expensive. Most people don't know how to exercise their rights so they give up.

Equality Outcomes – Baldeep

Baldeep briefly explained Equality Outcomes:

- Every four years, all public sector organisations are required to draft Equality Outcomes (EOs), to plan how they will advance equality and show that they are achieving their goals. Every two years, a progress report is published.
- ACC has different EOs in their role as a service provider, employer, education authority and licencing body.
- GREC is currently helping council to work towards outcomes and draft new ones.

- Soon we'll be circulating a survey looking at how ACC are doing in 2021-25, and priorities for 2025-29.
 - **Hussein** asked how we can resolve tension between equality outcomes and prevailing political agendas and priorities? (left as an open question)
-

Date of next meeting: Thursday 31 October, 4:00-5:00pm, online.

Agenda TBC.