

A sense of freedom



Stories about disabled people enjoying the countryside and outdoors

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Easy read summary





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What is this booklet about?



There are 5 stories from disabled people who like going into the outdoors.

They tell us about what they like doing when they go out into the countryside.

They tell us about ideas they have to make things better for disabled people.

What is the outdoors?



The outdoors can be the countryside of hills, mountains and forests.



It can be the green spaces with woods or rivers or parks in towns and cities.



It can be by the sea.

You can go outdoors to get out in the fresh air and exercise. You can see trees, flowers or animals.



Going to the outdoors can make you feel good. It can be good for your health.



The government wants everybody to get out into the outdoors and enjoy themselves.

Some people find it hard to go to the outdoors



We know there are some people who do not go to the outdoors very much. We want them to have more chances to go to the outdoors.

It is not so easy for many disabled people to get out into the outdoors.



We want to say thank you to the people who tell their stories in this booklet. Some of them have had to work hard to change things for disabled people in the outdoors.

We hope you will enjoy reading the stories in this booklet.



Becky Hanson, Jenny Smythe and Tracy Biggs

Becky, Jenny and Tracy live in the countryside. They all have learning disabilities.



Becky lives in a shared flat on a farm. All the young people on the farm have learning disabilities. They learn how to grow flowers and vegetables. They look after the animals. There are chickens, ducks, sheep, pigs and cows.

Jenny and Tracy live near the farm. They get support to help them live independently.



Transport is their biggest problem. It stops them getting around.

Becky says: "It is difficult because you can only go where there is a bus route. And they do not run often."



Becky is having driving lessons. But she needs someone to drive her to the town for her lessons.

Tracy likes walking to her job in a café. But not when it rains. She also likes shopping, watching TV, music and reading.

Jenny works in a school kitchen. She has to get a bus and then she gets a lift. But, there is not a bus at the right time to take her home. The headteacher from the school takes her home every night in her car.



Jenny says: “The buses are often not on time. When it snowed, the bus did not come and I was stranded. A lady took me into her house and I rang my boyfriend.” Jenny’s boyfriend came and picked her up in his car to take her home.



Jenny and her boyfriend like to drive into the forest and go for walks. Jenny also likes going to the cinema and shopping.



Becky, Jenny and Tracy want to change the buses:

- They want more buses to go to the places they want to go. They want to know the bus will turn up at the right time.
- If the buses were better they could go out more. They would be able to do more things in the outdoors and go out with their friends in the town.



Caroline Walsh

Caroline is a student. She is in a wheelchair. When she was a little girl her parents took her into the outdoors. They all had a good time.



When she got bigger her father got a special buggy. But it was too difficult to get over the fences. There were no special gates. There were only stiles. But you have to climb up steps and climb over a stile. They could not get the buggy over the stiles. Caroline was not happy. She did not want to go into the outdoors again.



Now Caroline works as a volunteer for a charity to help look after the sea and the beaches. A volunteer is not paid money for the work they do for the charity.



Caroline helps run events for disabled people at a wildlife centre. She wants people to know about animals, fish and other things to do with the sea and beaches.

With the charity, Caroline went to Holland. In that country they do more things to help disabled people.



She got lots of ideas about making the outdoors exciting for disabled people.

Caroline thinks things have got better in this country too. There are new laws to make things better for disabled people. People who run services are trying hard to make it easier for disabled people.

Sometimes she finds it hard to go to the sea and beaches in her wheelchair.

But she is excited about learning how to scuba dive. She goes deep down in the sea with special tanks of air to breathe.

Disabled people see what Caroline can do in her wheelchair and it makes them feel OK about having a go too.

Caroline's good ideas, she wants to see:

- people who run services in the outdoors learning from other people's good ideas.
- lots of different people – including disabled people – working together. She thinks there needs to be more disabled people who are volunteers.
- more money to help volunteers work with charities.





Jean Lawrence and Scampi

Jean lives in the countryside and loves walking with her dog Scampi.



Jean has hearing difficulties. Scampi is a Hearing Dog. He helps her because she cannot hear things or what people are saying. Jean uses a stick to help her walk because she has problems with her balance.



Jean says: "I love being out of doors. I can walk along the riverbank 2 or 3 times a day and always see something different." She likes seeing the birds and animals.



There is a new path that has a nice smooth surface, like a road. It is good for people in wheelchairs, people with pushchairs and bicycles. It is safe and away from cars.



But Jean does not like it when people on bicycles come up behind her. Sometimes they go very fast. She thinks people on bicycles need to be more careful.



Jean and her husband like to go on holiday in their caravan. They have a favourite place with lots of nice walks. Jean says: “It is so peaceful and there is so much to see.”

Scampi wears a special coat. It says: “Hearing Dogs for Deaf People.” It tells people that she can take Scampi into shops and cafés.



She is happy that people are good about letting Scampi come with her. She gave a talk about how important hearing dogs are to the National Trust. She thinks it is important that people who run services listen to disabled people.

Jean wants to take Scampi to the beach:

Jean cannot go to her favourite beach in the summer time. There is a sign saying: NO DOGS

Jean thinks people with Hearing Dogs and Guide Dogs should be able to go to the beach when they want to. They cannot leave their dog at home. She says they look after their dogs and always clean up any mess. She thinks this is against the law.

She thinks it is the same as taking Scampi into a shop or café.





Mark Austen

Mark loves the countryside. He had a car accident and now has a visual impairment. This means he has to use a cane because he cannot see.



One of Mark's favourite things to do is walking in the woods. He loves the sound of walking in the mud or in dry leaves. He listens to the wind and to the birds.

Mark loves to go fishing with his father. Sometimes he holds the fishing line or a special alarm so he knows a fish is there. He also likes to go fishing to a special lake just for disabled people.



Mark likes to go horse riding with someone who can see holding on to his horse. They can tell him about any dangers.



He also likes to fly his kite on a hill where there is lots of wind.

Mark likes going out with his wife or friends into the outdoors.



Mark remembers when he went for a walk in Cornwall along the cliffs by the sea. He went with someone who could see to make sure he was safe. He says: “It is very difficult to know how close you are to the edge! Walks like that are very exciting but very dangerous.”

He thinks special things for disabled people make a big difference. Good things are:



- Signs with information in Braille for people who cannot see
- Talking or audio guides to tell you what is happening if you cannot read or see
- Special trails or paths for people who cannot see
- Toilets for disabled people



Mark’s good ideas:

- You need to find out things before you go. He says: “It is a good idea to ring up the place you want to go to and ask lots of questions. How do you get there? How accessible is it? Can someone show you around?”
- People who run services need to tell disabled people about what is there for them. This will make disabled people feel OK about going out into the outdoors.



Brian Archer and Ace

Brian went blind when he was a little boy. He had an operation to help him see a little. He has a Guide Dog called Ace.



Brian loves to go sailing on the sea. He has special things on his boat so he can go sailing on his own. He loves feeling free and going fast.



Brian also likes to go walking. He is in a special club for blind people. People who can see go with them to help. Sometimes they all go away for a weekend into the countryside. Brian loves to get away from the noise and smell of cars and lorries.

Brian feels happy about going for walks in the outdoors. But he knows it can be difficult for some disabled people.



When he goes walking with Ace there can be problems. Sometimes a gate is chained up and will not open. Ace finds it difficult to climb up the steps and get over a stile. He likes the new kind of stile with a special door for dogs.



Crossing roads can be dangerous in the countryside. There are not special places to cross the road.



Sometimes a bridge is not very wide. This is difficult if you have a dog with you. He worries about stepping over the edge and falling.



Getting around London can be difficult for Brian. He has to carry Ace up the escalator if there are no stairs for them to walk up. Sometimes he has to ask people to help him. Brian has to use the underground to get from his home to the train station when he goes on walks with his club.



What Brian would like to change:

- People who run services do not always let Guide Dogs in to the cafe or shop. This is against the law. Brian says: “Even in big supermarkets like Tesco, I have been asked to leave with Ace.
- More needs to be done with training. People think a Guide Dog is like a pet dog. They are not.

Mencap helped to make this easy read accessibility@mencap.org.uk

Photos used in this document

We would like to thank these people for the photos:

Tina Stallard: Photo on front cover, photo 2 page 2, photos 2,3,4, page 3, photo 1 page 4, photo 2 page 6, photos 3, 4 page 7, photos 3,5 page 9, photos 1,3, page 10, photos 2, 4 page 11, photo 1 page 12, photos 2,3, page 13, photo 2 page 14

Carolyn Smith: Photo 1 page 5, photo 1 page 7, photo 1 page 11, photo 1 page 13

Hearing Dogs UK: Photo 1 page 9

Photosymbols: For other photos