

# The Social Model of Disability

## People are not disabled by their individual conditions of mind, body or senses.

Breakthrough UK Ltd uses the social model of disability in its policies and practice. The social model of disability has come about as disabled people and their own organisations have challenged the traditional view that they are disabled by their individual conditions of mind, body or senses (impairments).

## People with impairments are disabled by a society which excludes them.

People who have impairments are a part of the normal diversity of the population and as such should be taken into account in all areas of life. It is because society does not recognise people with impairments as a normal part of the population that they are excluded and discriminated against – that is, they are disabled by this situation.

## An inclusive society has no disabling barriers or segregation.

If society were to fully take account of people with impairments there would be no need for 'special' and segregated facilities in employment, education, transport, housing or any other area. In using the social model of disability Breakthrough UK Ltd does not use any form of segregated provision and promotes an approach that removes disabling barriers to mainstream life.

The social model of disability can be summed up in a definition of **disability** and **impairment**:–

**Disability** is the disadvantage or restriction of activity caused by a society which takes little or no account of people who have impairments, and thus excludes them from mainstream activity.

**Impairment** is certain individual appearance or certain functional limitations of the mind, body or senses.

(Credit: Union of Physically Impaired Against Segregation 1976: this wording copyright Breakthrough UK Ltd)

# The Principles of Independent Living

**Independence** does not mean doing everything for ourselves. Society is organised on systems of interdependence. For example, most of us go to a professional to get our hair cut, but we have control over who we go to, when, and what type of hair style we have. Independence is about choice and control. Disabled people have identified **seven needs for independent living**. These were drawn up by the Derbyshire Coalition of Disabled People.

## 1. Information

Disabled people require accessible information on what is available to assist with independent living.

## 2. Peer Support

Disabled People need the support of other disabled people to discuss how to make best use of the information obtained and for ongoing support.

## 3. Housing

Disabled People need accessible housing. This may mean wheelchair access or support and advice to enable some disabled people to live in their own homes.

## 4. Equipment

Many disabled people need practical equipment to assist them in living independently.

## 5. Personal Assistance

This is the one to one support that some disabled people need to live in their own home and be part of the community.

## 6. Transport

This includes physical access to public transport, accessible information about the routes, assistance for passengers and routes which take into account the needs of disabled people. It also includes access to personal transport such as cars.

## 7. Access

This covers physical access such as dropped kerbs, level entrances to buildings and accessible toilets. It also covers access to all aspects of mainstream life, involving the removal of barriers caused by systems, practices and attitudes which prevent disabled people from participating.