

More accessible and inclusive Games.

Case in London 2012

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■ Overview

Ms. Margaret Hickish is an accessibility design specialist, and currently working as the Accessibility and Inclusion Manager at Network Rail, a company which owns and manages the rail network in the UK. She was an accessibility manager for the Olympic Delivery Authority (ODA) during the 2012 London Games and made a significant contribution for socially inclusive Games. In this article, she shares with us her experiences in transforming London accessible during the preparation of the Games, as well as the perception changes towards disabled people in London.

■ Setting a standard for hosting socially inclusive Games

MURC(M): What was the role of the ODA for hosting socially inclusive Games?

Hickish(H): When we were approaching to 2012, we routed a strategy on how we would make sport venues and other buildings more inclusive. We routed series of new standards that we expect people to apply it. Because of London 2012, there was a new way of working considered constructions which was about how we could actually design buildings from the outset being accessible and inclusive. One of the big problems with setting standards of accessibility is that everybody rushes to the minimum rather than actually looking up for what works. To develop the standard, a user group called “build environment accessibility panel” was effective. This was very important as disabled people could feel

that they had an ownership and involvement in development of the design. This changed the design quite radically.

Also, the legislation “Equality Act” was made 2 years before the games, which requires public bodies to consider support for different types of disability, older people, younger people and people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender. Normally, the standard for the Games from the IOC and IPC would only be required in the Olympic Village. But we put one in every venue. The reason we did was because it was going to be a part of legacy. We have to not just think about what happens during the games.

M: Can you tell us more about the Equality Act?

H: First of all, we have building regulations, but the governments are much more hands off development. Our legislation Equality Act states that every service provider has a duty to remove barriers to inclusion for disabled people particular but also for everyone. But the legislation is very broad. The specific comes down to things such as “British standard”. So it is actually much more hands off than absolutely you must follow. Within Equality Act 2010, there is a section called “public sector equality duty”, which states every local authority which is responsible to public rail, for example, has a duty to consider how it meets the needs of the people covered by the Equality Act.

M : Please tell us your opinion on “inclusive design”?

H: Inclusive design is about willingness and openness to understand things such as how people use things. It is not about ergonomics as disabled people do things differently. Inclusive design is about understanding other people’s life. Our user group did help. We involved a lot of users and exchange opinions on what each



person thinks of various situations. It is all about people understanding the impact on people's life.

■ Perception changes

M: How did the standard affect the people's attitude?

H: Now I can see the standard changed the perception that many people who we worked with on the Games. Many of the architects and engineers I have worked with when we were developing the Olympic park and venues are now carrying the good work ethic of delivering something better than just minimum. And that has been one of the big step changes. Other big step change was the realisation from the designers. We got them to understand that disabled people wanted to go to the Olympic Game which was something people did not actually think about. They had assumed that Olympics games would only be for people who are not disabled. We wanted to ensure that if people wanted to go to see the sports, it did not matter if you are disabled or not.

M: Was there any difficulty to make a perception change?

H: For educating designers, there was also a difficulty. There is always some audience who do not agree with. The solution for that was capturing people's imagination. It is about how you make it real for them. I always tell them that if they can make it to age of 95, and they have not had any problems of their sight, hearing, and any of mobility, they are lucky. It is about them realising that it is everyone's matter. And that is the most powerful thing for someone who think inclusive design is not important.

M: Please tell us more about the ODA's effort to promote social inclusion?

H: The other thing that the ODA, as well as LOCOG and GLA did was employing more disabled people. We had a programme which encourages disabled people to apply for work. And the increased number of disabled people at work made them very visible to public. Just that visibility help change the people's perceptions as people could see the possibilities of disabled people being at work. Also we must add

that not only ODA but also the TV broadcaster Channel 4 contributed for a change. They did an extensive TV coverage of the Paralympic Games, which made a significant contribution for the perception change.

M: Please tell us more about the perception change in London in general?

H: People are now talking to disabled people which is another part of a legacy. In London, people never spoke to disabled people in the street before the Games. They never really met the eye of many disabled people who are obviously disabled. Games changed that. People started to say hello. That is because I believe people



start seeing disabled people as a person. I think that was one of the big changes we saw.

Margaret Hickish

Margaret is the Access and Inclusion Manager at Network Rail ensuring Inclusive design is incorporated from the outset on various projects and contributing to R&D where it has an inclusive design requirements. She was the Accessibility Manager at the Olympic Delivery Authority (ODA) and worked closely with all ODA project sponsors and CLM project managers to delivery inclusively designed projects on time and on budget during the preparation of the London 2012 Games. She is the experts in inclusive design in the UK. In 2015, she was awarded Member of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (MBE) for services to disabled people.