



# Young People's Rights Review

## Claire Forde MSYP - Disability and Independence

Hi, I am Claire Forde. I am 22 years old and I live in Greenock, in Inverclyde. I am the MSYP representing the RNIB Youth Forum, Haggeye.

I have consulted with approximately 50 of the Haggeye membership ie the young people of Scotland who are blind or partially-sighted, in person, at 2 recent meetings, to ascertain what are the main rights issues and concerns they encounter daily, living with sight-loss.

The rights issue that I wish to address you on today is Disability/Independence: in other words, the rights of disabled young blind or visually-impaired people to live independently - protected by Article 19 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The membership of Haggeye told me that they - and the wider disabled community - face many barriers that can be daunting and can seriously impede our independence, personal development and can stifle our progress towards our goals in life.

A major challenge faced is the use of public transport. Travelling around is taken for granted by sighted people but the simple task of getting from A to B can often be a major obstacle for those with sight issues.

Please consider for a moment how a blind or partially-sighted person might be affected by, for instance, the cancellation of a bus or train service at short notice, or a change to a bus or train timetable. Something as simple as this presents blind and partially-sighted people with difficulties that need not be insurmountable in a modern society such as ours. Many trains now provide helpful announcements, advising passengers of the next scheduled stop and offer a Passenger Assist service. Alas, the same cannot be said for bus companies and this can prove problematic for when we strive to be independent.

Other issues we face include those of isolation and exclusion in schools and in further education. We experience bullying and a lack of empathy from peers. Haggeye members also wished to highlight the lack of awareness amongst those in education with regards to the issues affecting the blind and partially-sighted. This manifests itself in many ways, including the use of papers with small font sizes, which are indecipherable to partially-sighted students. Classes may be changed at short notice; unplanned library sessions may be introduced which put us at a disadvantage or university lectures may be moved from one campus to another on an ad hoc basis, without additional support offered to us.

I note that there is no reference to blind or partially-sighted young people yet in the draft summary of the Children and Young People's Rights National Action Plan. **To assist with these issues, the introduction of a Bus and Train Charter would be most welcome. RNIB Scotland have their own bus charter which over 80% of**

bus companies are signed up to which sets out best practice for bus operators when interacting with blind or partially sighted customers, including increased communication, stopping at every stop where someone is waiting and looking into installing audio systems on their buses that announce stops as the bus approaches them. This could be incorporated into a Young Scots Bus Charter. A positive development to note is that in the Lothian and Borders region something like this already exists and announcements are made on all buses, trams and trains. We would like to see this innovation extended to all Scottish regions.

We would also like to see the introduction of a 'Buddy System' for blind and visually impaired students in mainstream schools. We would also welcome training for teachers and lecturers on sight-guiding and overall awareness of the very real issues affecting those with sight loss, seeking a good school or further education.

These changes would require adequate, sufficient earmarked funding and planning involving us - as per last year's recommendation to the UK from the UN Committee on the Rights of Person with Disabilities' review in paragraph 45.

Living with sight loss is a huge challenge for any young person. In today's society it is incumbent upon all bodies providing public transport and education to cater for the basic requirements of persons with sight loss. The changes suggested by Haggeye would be a good start and would assist young people who are blind or partially-sighted greatly with their journey to fully realise their rights to living independently.