The Social Model of Disability Easy Read

The Social Model of Disability is a different way of looking at the world and disabled people's experience of the world.

It is an easy way to stop Disabled people being put down and left out. It is not a perfect model, and does not claim to be, but it does take the blame for the difficulties
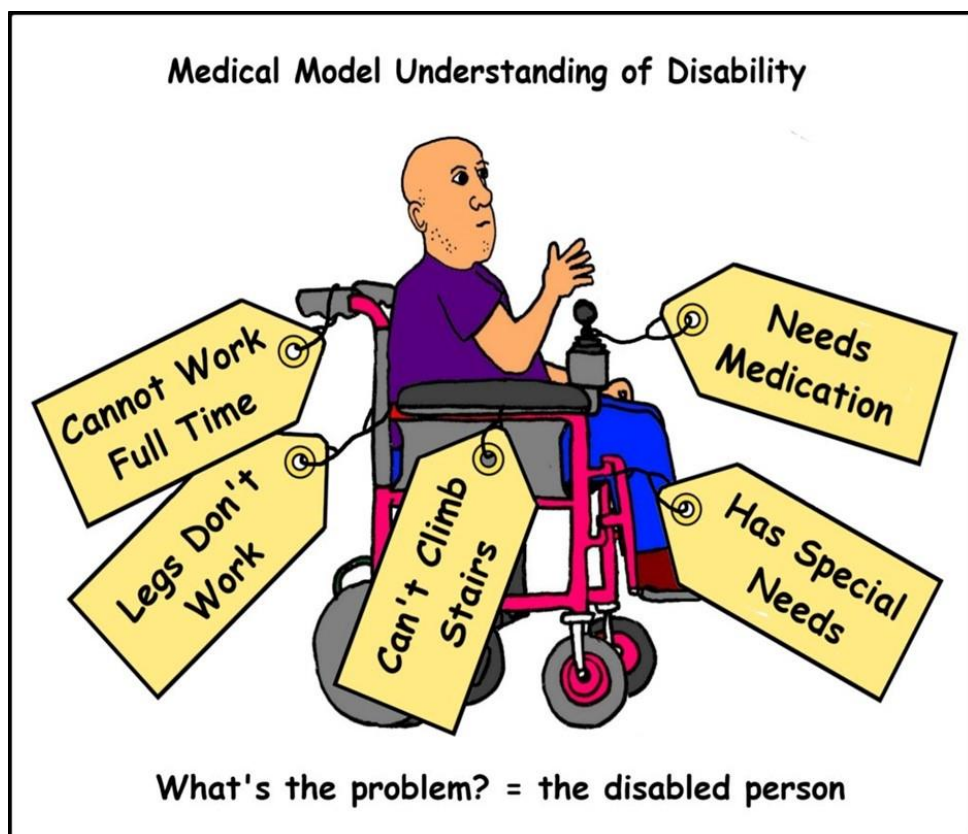

Disabled people have in navigating the world around them, away from the person and onto the environment we live in.

So it is not a person in a wheelchair's fault that they cannot go up stairs, it is that there is no ramp or lift to enable them to access other floors.

The medical model, on the other hand, puts the blame for being disabled on the disabled person.

It focuses on what a person can't do because of their medical or health condition.

It talks about what is `wrong' with the person, not what is `wrong' with the situation, context or environment.

It implies that disabled people should be changed or fixed.

The Social Model of Disability

With the Social Model of Disability, disabled people do not need to change who they are in order to get the same rights and opportunities as non disabled people.

We can see that what people **do** about disability depends on what they **think** about disability.

Barriers in society

There are many main barriers that disabled people have to get over just to live as normal a life as possible, barriers that able bodied people do not even have to think about.

We will talk about the main three, but there are probably lots of others that people have experienced.

1. Physical Barriers:

These are the things in the environment that prevent disabled people getting around in the world.

They could be steps, lack of lifts in buildings, doors that do not automatically open and are difficult to push, uneven pavements or lack of space for wheelchairs in rooms and meetings.

2. Information and Communication

These barriers are more common than even physical barriers, and they include lack of support everywhere for people who are visually impaired, or who are Deaf, for whom English is not their first language, and lack of plain English.

They also include the language used to describe Disabled people, or to communicate with Disabled people.

Terms like `wheelchair bound' imply that the person in a wheelchair is almost a prisoner of their disability.

In the Social Model of Disability, `wheelchair user' is a better term as it is more positive.

3. Attitudes

This can be the most distressing and is one of the most common barriers.

This is about people who think that the medical model of disability is how they should think about disabled people that there is something wrong with them, so they need to be `fixed', and can be spoken down to, or ignored.

People make assumptions about disabled people, such as they can't work, or they need 24 hour care, or they need help with everything.

So some wheelchair users waiting to cross the road may find themselves being forcibly and surprisingly taken across the road by a stranger who thinks that they want to cross at that time.

Or people will think nothing of asking disabled people very personal questions about their impairment.

This is not malicious, it is just unthinking. Most Disabled people have to think about every aspect of their lives in a way that able bodied people do not.

Changing how we talk about disability can also change how we think about it. **The social model of disability makes an important <u>distinction between "impairments" and "disabilities."</u>**

Impairments can be thought of as the functional limitations an individual might face (i.e., not being able to walk).

Disabilities, on the other hand, are the disadvantages imposed on individuals by a society that views and treats impairments as abnormal, hence worthy of exclusion.
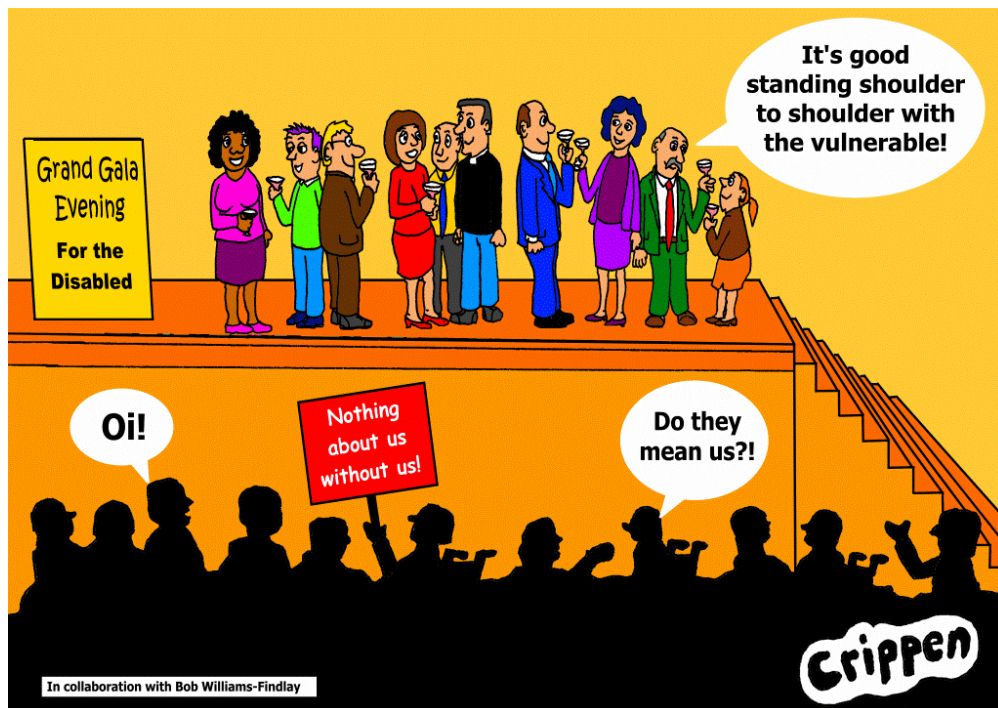
Disability Action Haringey's approach to disability

Disability Action Haringey follows the social model of disability.

We believe that disabled people face barriers in society that prevent them from fully taking part in life and the world.

Our focus is on trying to remove those barriers, and supporting disabled people to have independence, and make choices about their own lives.

We know that not everybody follows the social model of disability. However you choose to describe your own disability, we're here to support you.