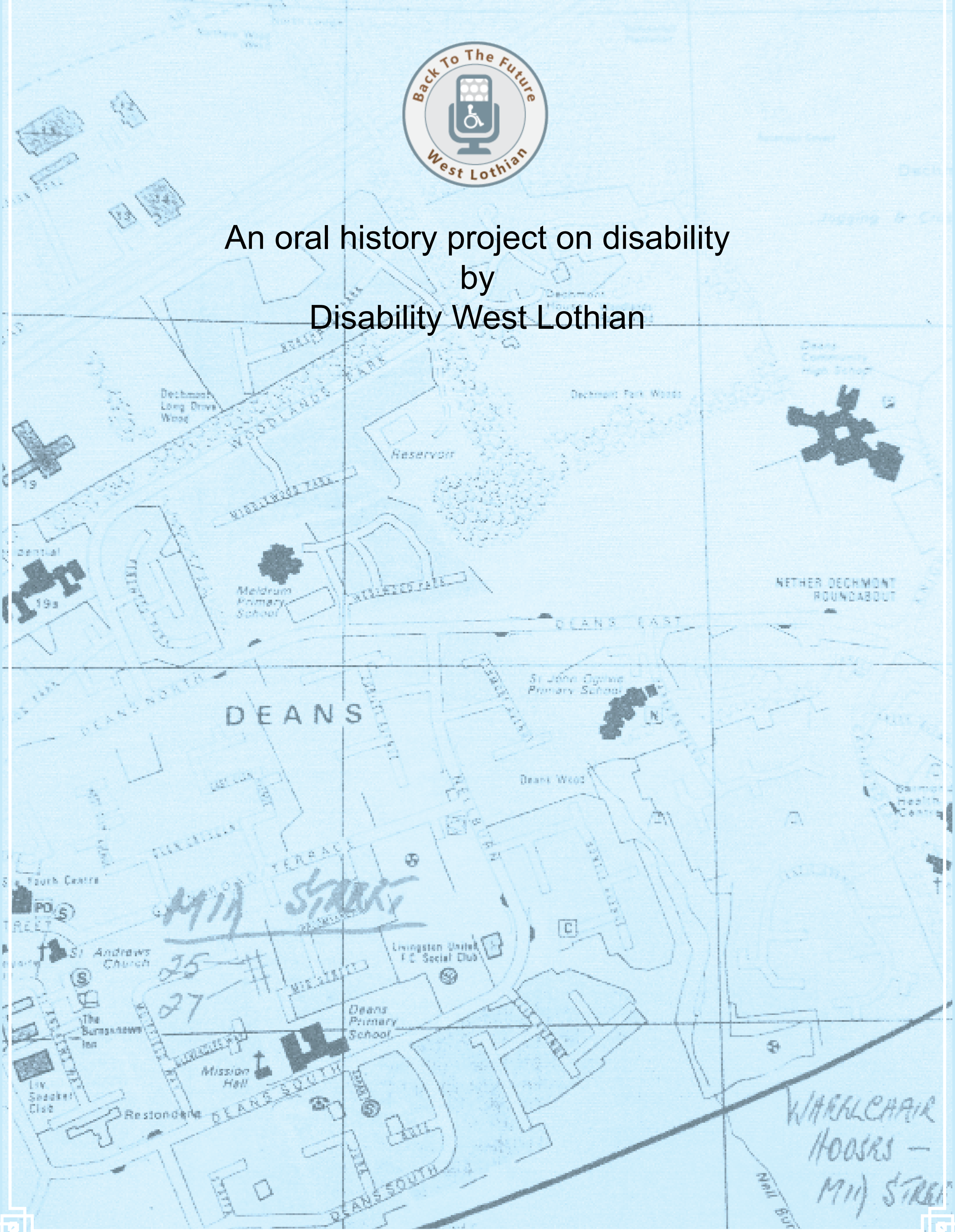
BACK TO THE FUTURE
WEST LOTHIAN

An oral history project on disability
by
Disability West Lothian



Content

heritage lottery fund
LOTTERY FUNDED

West Lothian

West Lothian, the second smallest of Scotland’s mainland counties is located on the southern shore of the River Forth and sits in the middle of central Scotland between the major cities of Glasgow and Edinburgh.

The county we know today, was made up from the historic counties of Linlithgowshire and part of Edinburghshire, but after some major boundary changes in 1975 the modern-day West Lothian was created as a district of the Lothian Region (made up of the East, Mid and West Lothians).

In 1996 West Lothian Council was established, and currently serves a community of over 170,000 citizens and makes up around 4% of the population of Scotland.

The main towns are Linlithgow, Torphichen, Bathgate, Armadale, Broxburn, Uphall, East, Mid and West Calder, Bo’ness, Blackburn, Whitburn, and Livingston, the fourth of Scotland’s New Towns and the largest population centre in the Lothians, after Edinburgh.

Introduction

Back to the Future West Lothian is an oral history project on disability, by Disability West Lothian. We wanted to capture the views and shared experiences of disabled people in West Lothian. To recognise how things have changed, the majority for the better, whilst acknowledging difficulties of the past. Collecting oral histories, as a record of how disability access knowledge and equality has changed over the years seemed like the perfect way for us to do this. We are very grateful to the Heritage Lottery for giving us funding to carry out our project.

This booklet shares some of the stories shared with us, and information we found while researching disability in West Lothian.

Gordon Mungall
- Chair of Disability West Lothian

West Lothian Voluntary Council for Disabled People
(Now Disability West Lothian) Community Transport Initiative 1988
Image courtesy of West Lothian Courier

Disability West Lothian

Disability West Lothian was established in 1976 as the West Lothian Voluntary Council for Disabled People, run by members who themselves had a disability, to highlight the needs of people with a disability within the county and to work to ensure disabled people can participate fully as equal citizens by emphasising that disability is not with the individual but with the social and physical environment in which that person operates.

By 1988, the organisation had become a registered charity with premises in Bathgate and a small team of staff and volunteers as well as a minibus which was acquired to help with the access issues faced by local disability and voluntary groups. In 2000, the organisation moved into the newly built Ability Centre in Livingston which also served as a base for their council funded disability information and advice service.


Polbeth Market Garden Project, West Lothian 1995
Image courtesy of Disability West Lothian

Over the years they went on to establish many projects and campaigns to break down barriers and facilitate access for people with a disability within West Lothian, some of these projects included Worklink – Scotland’s first integrated Training and Employment Unit for people with a disability, Polbeth Market Garden – a project which trained young people with learning disabilities in gardening as well as personal and life skills. Disability Equality Scheme – developed in partnership with the Council, Mental Health Advocacy and Ace Advocacy. Jargonbusters – a user led group to work with local organisations and businesses in the creation of accessible information and a Living Book Project – a project run along with Mental Health Options for Older People (MOODS) to introduce the elderly and people with a disability to the internet. Disability West Lothian staff and members were also proactive in ensuring the needs of people with a disability were highlighted when creating local legislation or undertaking community development projects. This included having a presence on local disability forums, consulting on the development of public buildings and services and creating many ‘Have Your Say’ events over the years.

"Disability West Lothian is the best thing that's happened, because I get a lot out of it. Although it is voluntary work, I do my bit. I was in the office from 8.30 to 4.30 every day and it was better than doing a full-time job. Because it is good to meet people coming in for advice. It has been good for me." Moira, 53, long-standing volunteer for Disability West Lothian

Disability West Lothian memories from Moria Mungall

I first got involved with Disability West Lothian 1987-88. I was working at Carers of West Lothian in Bathgate and they were shutting down, I went next door and found Disability West Lothian. I was introduced to Marilyn Young and began secretarial work/admin 5 days a week, and I've been involved ever since. They were a great crowd, after we moved to Hopetoun Lane, we got new projects going.

It was really good working there, we had a good workforce, quite a hard working environment. I was in before the staff at 8.30am, and the last out, I enjoyed it, there was no point going home. I had a great relationship with staff, we had lots of socials, Christmas lunches, barbecues, birthday celebrations, there was a real community spirit.

If people came in looking for support there was always someone to speak to, and they would quickly be directed to whoever could best support them. We had a lot to do with Barnardo's, Acredale house and the elderly, and when all the local training centres started up Disability West Lothian got involved with the people who attended them, to see if they could support them in any way. My brother volunteered with the Community Transport project, and he passed his test to drive mini buses.

Rotary Funded trip to Kielder in the original Community Transport Vehicle. Images courtesy of Disability West Lothian.

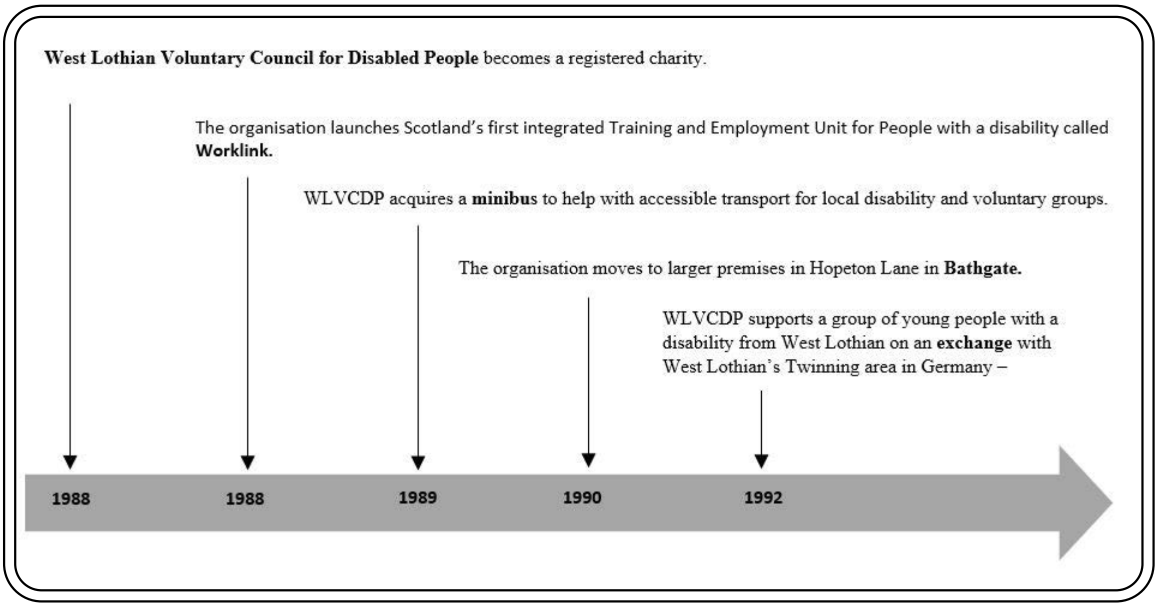
I have two favourite memories:

One is when the Special Olympics were in Glasgow, and we got tickets for us and our friends, to see the opening ceremony at Celtic Park. We used community transport services to take us there, my brother volunteered to come along too. My dad wasn't aware we were going until he saw us on the telly!

The second is from 1994 when the Rotary Club or Round Table gave us money to go to Kielder, for a week's holiday. I wasn't booked to go but someone pulled out and I was told to get my case packed and go the next day!

Back to the Future West Lothian: I'm looking forward to reading and hearing other experiences of people with disabilities, especially regarding education and the provision of therapies within educational settings in comparison with modern additional support schools.

Disability West Lothian Timeline



West Lothian Voluntary Council for Disabled People becomes a registered charity.

The organisation launches Scotland's first integrated Training and Employment Unit for People with a disability called **Worklink.**

WLVCDP acquires a **minibus** to help with accessible transport for local disability and voluntary groups.

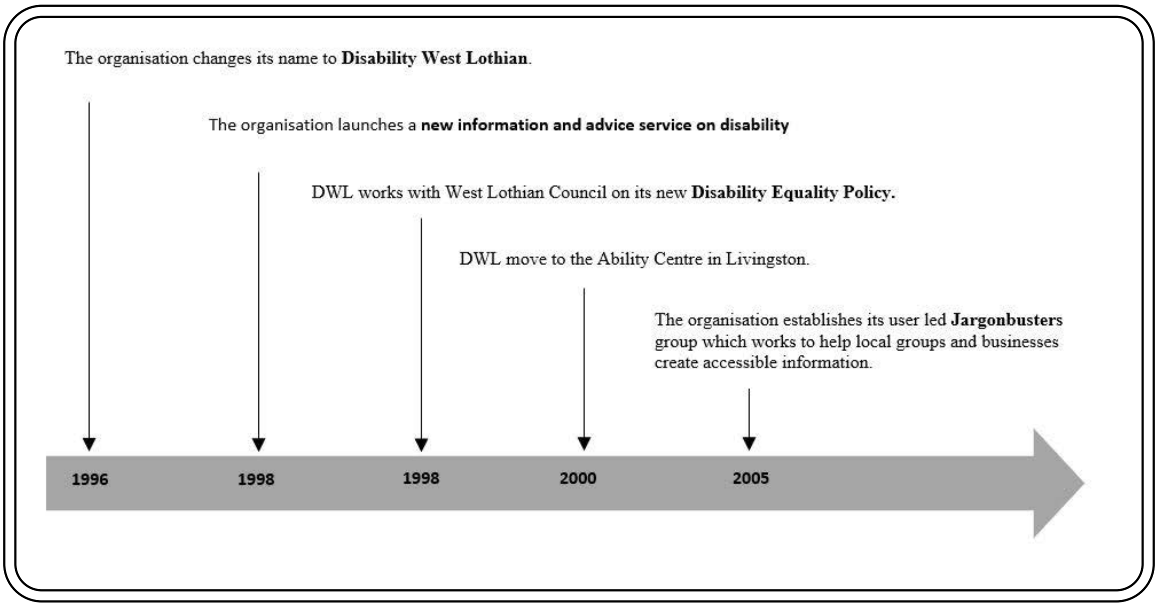
The organisation moves to larger premises in Hopeton Lane in **Bathgate.**

WLVCDP supports a group of young people with a disability from West Lothian on an **exchange** with West Lothian's Twinning area in Germany –

Lottery funded Community Transport vehicle, 1997
Image courtesy of Disability West Lothian.

The work begins to transform a panel van into a Lottery funded accessible community vehicle, 1997
Images courtesy of Disability West Lothian.

Disability West Lothian Timeline



1996 – The organisation changes its name to **Disability West Lothian**.

1998 – The organisation launches a **new information and advice service on disability**

1998 – DWL works with West Lothian Council on its new **Disability Equality Policy.**

2000 – DWL move to the Ability Centre in Livingston.

2005 – The organisation establishes its user led **Jargonbusters** group which works to help local groups and businesses create accessible information.

The West Lothian Council for Disabled People cheering Ian on.
Image courtesy of Disability West Lothian.

In 1991, The West Lothian Council for Disabled People benefited from £400. The money was raised by Ian Robertson, who entered the Cowdenbeath Racewall Scottish Banger Championship. Ian took 2nd place in his heat and then won the final. The money was used to help fund a visit to Hochsauerlandkreis in Germany for staff and volunteers from Disability West Lothian.

Ian Robertson with the West Lothian Council for Disabled People sponsored stock car.
Image courtesy of West Lothian Courier.

Stock car driver's a real winner!

STOCK car driver Ian Robertson entered a national race with a noble cause behind him.

And it paid off — for the Blackburn man became Scottish champion.

Ian, Saloon Stock Car Driver 236, entered the Cowdenbeath Racewalls Scottish Banger Chamionships at the weekend.

Driving a sponsored banger, he intended to raise cash for the West Lothian Voluntary Council for Disabled People, who sent along a band of supporters to cheer Ian on.

Their encouragement paid off and Ian took 2nd place in his heat before coming top in the final.

Marilyn Young, company secretary of the Voluntary Council, said: "Ian knows some people connected with the organisation and he wanted to support us.

"He raised £400, which will be a great benefit for the voluntary council."

The cash will help fund a visit to Hochsauerlandkreis in Germany by a group of people with disabilities and learning difficulties.

Article courtesy of
West Lothian Courier.

In 2015, like so many third sector organisations, Disability West Lothian lost their core funding due to budget cuts and the organisation was forced to return to its grassroots as a purely voluntary organisation which continues to be led by its Board. Many of the stories that have been collected in this Oral History have been shared by some of the organisation's volunteers and many of the histories shared by our respondents are often intertwined with the history of Disability West Lothian itself.

8 LOTHIAN WORLD, Friday, March 24,1995

CHEQUES FOR THE DISABLED

LOCAL groups scooped grant cheques from the West Lothian Access Committee last week to upgrade their facilites for disabled people.

The committee handed out the money to improve accessibility, allowing the disabled to make greater use of facilites.

Organisations qualify to receive the cash from the scheme by applying to the Access Committee who decide on which will receive funding before passing on their recommendations to the district council to secure funds.

Funding of up to 75 per. cent. up to a maximum of £1000 is available to voluntary organisations and up to 50 per. cent. up to a maximum of £1000 on commercial projects.

Among the projects which received cash was Broxburn Parish Church which received £500 to instal an induction loop system to allow parishoners to hear the service.

Andrew Baird, secretary of the Access Committee is in no doubt of the benefits that the committee can provide for the local communities.

He said: "The grants scheme is very important to local people because it raises public awareness about the needs of disabled people and helps to alleviate some of the problems which they face."

Other projects receiving funding included Fauldhouse Bowling Club which gained £1000 to provide a ramp and handrail. West Lothian Voluntary Council for Disabled People also received £1000 to provide an accessible toilet at their office and £200 went to West Lothian Mobility Initiative to provide marked parking bays at their offices in Livingston.

Picture on left: The Reverend Andrew Moyes receives the £500 for Broxburn Parish from Access Committee secretary Andrew Baird. (Left to right) are Edwin Couston, Mary Moyes, Rev Moyes, Gordon Mungall, Andrew Baird and May Methven.

Pictured on right: Secretary Andrew Baird hands over the £1000 cheque to West Lothian Voluntary Council for Disabled People's representatives Maureen Boyd, Catriona Scally, Frances Hunt and Jackie Ross.

Pictured below: Bathgate British Legion's chairman Chic Paterson receives the £472.50 cheque from Andrew Baird last week.

Article courtesy of Lothian World, 1995

Many community projects, across West Lothian benefited from the Access Fund.

Doing a grand job

■ TWO youth organisations have been given £1000 grants to help make life easier for the disabled.

■ West Lothian Area Scout Council provided a ramp and more accessible toilets at their Craigs Camping and Training Centre near Torphichen.

■ And the Girl Guide Association will include similar facilities when they upgrade the guide hall in Linlithgow.

■ The grants came from the West Lothian Access Fund, which is sponsored and administered by the district council and West Lothian Voluntary Council for Disabled People.

■ Commercial companies can get up to half the cost of projects, and non-commercial groups up to 75 per cent, up to a maximum of £1000.

■ And the fund is available for all premises in public use, including shops, restaurants, pubs, hotels, offices and sports, community and recreational facilities.

■ For more information about the fund, contact secretary Andrew Baird at West Lothian Access Committee, 2 Hopetoun Lane, Bathgate, or telephone 0506 652924.

■ Our pictures show (left) Guides County Commissioner Sally McMath accepting the cheque from Access Committee officials Andrew Baird and Frances hunt.

■ And (below) Dr Andrew Bain, chairman of the Craigs management committee, collects £1000 from Access Committee officials Gordon Mungall, Frances Hunt and Andrew Baird.

Now hear this!

A BRAND new system is to be installed at Linlithgow's Burgh Halls by the town's film society in a bid to help the hard of hearing.

And a grant of £595 from the West Lothian Access Committee is sure to make all the difference.

Bob Henderson, chairman of Linlithgow Film Society, said: "We're absolutely delighted with the Access Committee grant."

The new induction loop system works by allowing sound to be broadcast direct, by way of a small switch, to a listener's hearing aid.

Some 60 members of the film society are OAPs and many use hearing aids.

Bob added: "We're not only delighted with the grant, we're delighted we can offer this new service. After 22 years, our big problem has always been the quality of sound available.

"The new amplifiers and speakers we're getting this season, plus the new loop system, will mean we've got it as good as we can."

The new equipment, including two updated projectors, is expected to cost up to £3000 — money well spent, for other groups are able to make use of the new system in the North Hall of the Burgh Halls.

●Our picture shows Andrew Baird (left), secretary of the Access committee, chairman Gordon Mungall and Bob Henderson, chairman of Linlithgow Film Society, with the cheque.

Articles courtesy of West Lothian Courier

Access Committee

Throughout the 80s and 90s more opportunities were becoming available and access to local groups and facilities were increasing for people with a disability within their communities. The West Lothian Access Committee was providing grants to assist local businesses and organisations to become more accessible and encouraging good access practice through their awards scheme.

Getting a lift from friends

TWO years of fund-raising by West Lothian Voluntary Council for Disabled People has finally paid off — with the installation of a £13,500 stair-lift at their premises in Hopetoun Lane, Bathgate.

Company secretary Marlyn Young said: "Our fund-raising efforts began as soon as we moved here because even though the ground floor was three times bigger than our previous home in Jarvey Street, we immediately recognised the desirability of making the top floor fully accessible.

"It wasn't easy because the cost of the lift kept going up and our target always semed just out of reach, but we're all delighted that our aim has now been fully achieved."

Marlyn added: "The improved facility will provide greater training opportunities, especially in computing and should also lead to increased membership of groups supported by the organisation."

In addition to general fund-raising activities, cash for the stair-lift came from The Charles Hayward Trust, Levi Community Involvement Team in Whitburn and the Disablement Advisory Service.

■ *Pictured right using the new lift is Moira Currie.*

Article from 1991.
Image courtesy of
West Lothian Courier

The West Lothian Access Committee started in the mid to late 80s, set up by a group of disabled people who wanted better access to their local communities.
Its activities are based on the belief that the needs of people with disabilities, older people and carers of young children should be considered as an integral part of the design process and that by meeting these needs, buildings and services will perform better for all users.

The majority of members of the Access Committee are individuals with direct experience of disability, who work closely with West Lothian Council officials along with other agencies to achieve equal access for all.

The Access Committee has been involved in a wide range of local projects:

- Almondvale shopping centre
- West Lothian Council Wheelchair Accessible Housing
- Consulted on new Council buildings like West Calder High School, Linlithgow and North Livingston Partnership Centres
- Improvements to Livingston Designer Outlet
- Paths for All – Dropped Kerbs improvement scheme in West Lothian Communities
- Livingston Football Stadium
- Access and walk-through audits given to Blackburn United FC and Broxburn Athletic FC Grounds
- Local Taxi issues affecting Disabled People

In West Lothian, the County Council Welfare Committee organised a number of ‘Help the Disabled’ weeks throughout the sixties to “bring to the notice the services being provided to disabled people and at the same time authorities may learn of the people in need of these services”.

Although this brought more awareness to the needs of people with a disability at this time– the impression was still of a segregated group who needed help.

“I always needed to…have accessibility for toilet facilities…but because you don’t advertise that disability, nobody knows your needing things like that”
Geraldine A, 66, born with an atopic bladder

In 1970, Alf Morris, who went on to become the first Minister for the Disabled, saw the introduction of what became known as the ‘Magna Carta’ of disability legislation – the 1970 Chronically Sick & Disabled Persons Act where local authorities were given responsibility for welfare services and housing extending to providing practical assistance for people in their own homes, organising the provision of meals for people at home or within day centres, and the adaptation of houses to meet people’s needs.

In the first decade of the act, members of the Post Office Engineering Union installed 70,000 telephone lines in their spare time for a nominal charge which was then donated to disability charities.

The Act also gave people with disabilities the right to equal access, recreational and educational facilities and this included helping with travel which was all to be provided by local authorities.

In the same year, Edinburgh was to host the 1970 Commonwealth Paraplegic Games and a number of West Lothian athletes took part which led to an upsurge of interest in sports for people with a disability in the county.

Wheelchair competitors take part in an unidentified track event at the Paraplegic Games in Edinburgh in July 1970.
© The Scotsman Publications Ltd.

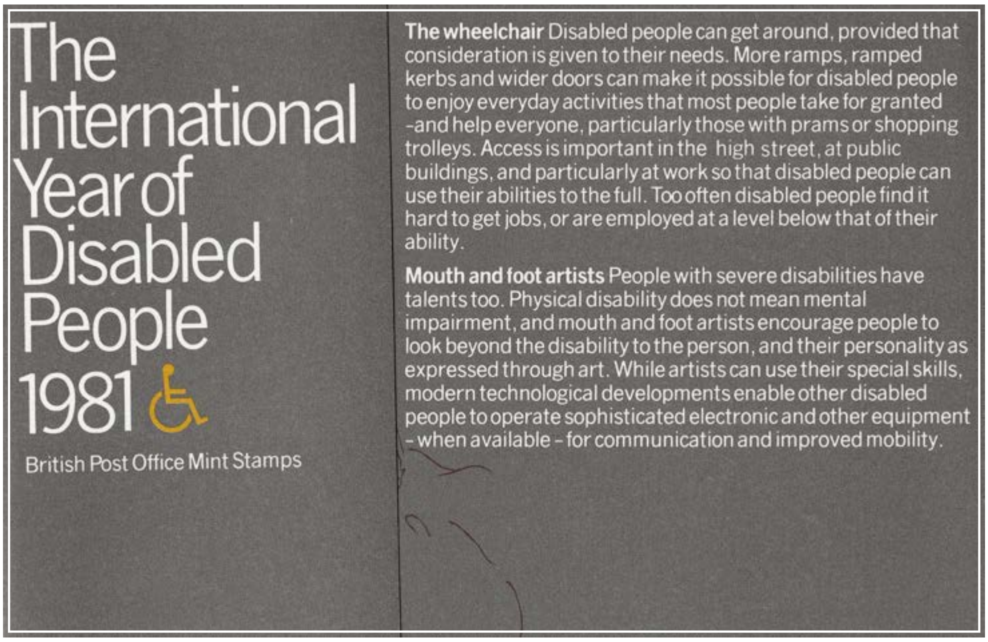
"I remember 'the Year of the Disabled', that was 1981. That was the first time disability was focussed on TV and the media."
Gordon M, 53, was born with Cerebral Palsy.

The 1980s began to see a shift in attitudes towards disability and the United Nations named 1981 the International Year of Disabled People, with its main theme being 'full participation and equality'. This was the first major event to place disability issues into a global context and numerous British organisations involved with disability, benefited enormously from grants and media attention for the first time.

A limited edition postcard published by Veldale to coincide with the Post Office commemorative stamps issued 25/3/1981

Scan of the four stamps issued 25/03/1981

The stamps were illustrations by Elizabeth Twistington Higgins MBE, a former ballet dancer who became totally paralysed due to poliomyelitis in 1953. She was a member of the Mouth and Foot Painting Artists Association and became an internationally famous mouth painter who was awarded the MBE for her work.



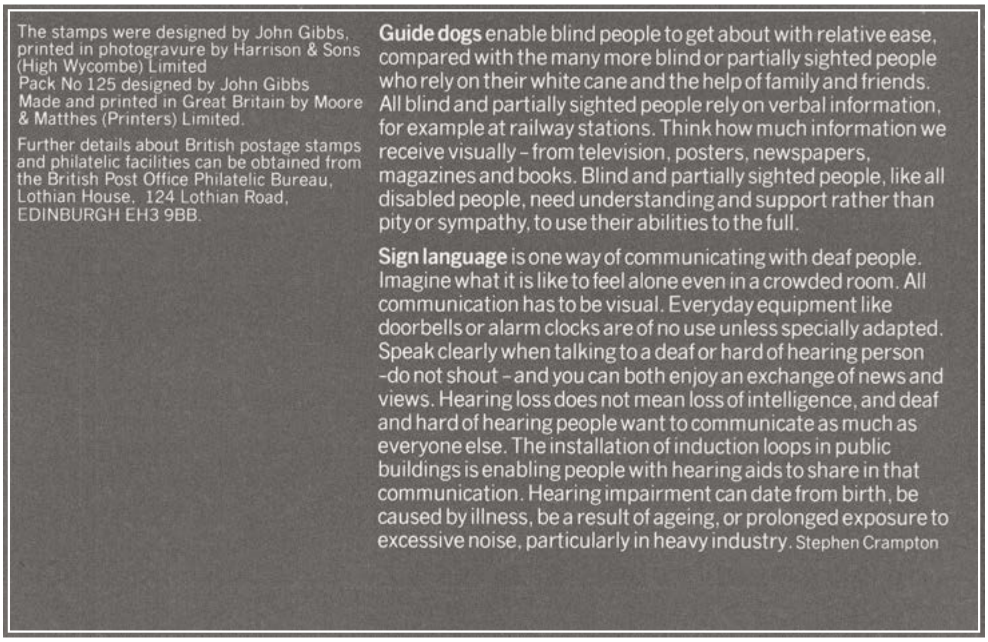
The International Year of Disabled People 1981 ♿

British Post Office Mint Stamps

The wheelchair Disabled people can get around, provided that consideration is given to their needs. More ramps, ramped kerbs and wider doors can make it possible for disabled people to enjoy everyday activities that most people take for granted -and help everyone, particularly those with prams or shopping trolleys. Access is important in the high street, at public buildings, and particularly at work so that disabled people can use their abilities to the full. Too often disabled people find it hard to get jobs, or are employed at a level below that of their ability.

Mouth and foot artists People with severe disabilities have talents too. Physical disability does not mean mental impairment, and mouth and foot artists encourage people to look beyond the disability to the person, and their personality as expressed through art. While artists can use their special skills, modern technological developments enable other disabled people to operate sophisticated electronic and other equipment - when available - for communication and improved mobility.

Scan of the stamp booklet cover, front image



The stamps were designed by John Gibbs, printed in photogravure by Harrison & Sons (High Wycombe) Limited
Pack No 125 designed by John Gibbs
Made and printed in Great Britain by Moore & Matthes (Printers) Limited.

Further details about British postage stamps and philatelic facilities can be obtained from the British Post Office Philatelic Bureau, Lothian House, 124 Lothian Road, EDINBURGH EH3 9BB.

Guide dogs enable blind people to get about with relative ease, compared with the many more blind or partially sighted people who rely on their white cane and the help of family and friends. All blind and partially sighted people rely on verbal information, for example at railway stations. Think how much information we receive visually - from television, posters, newspapers, magazines and books. Blind and partially sighted people, like all disabled people, need understanding and support rather than pity or sympathy, to use their abilities to the full.

Sign language is one way of communicating with deaf people. Imagine what it is like to feel alone even in a crowded room. All communication has to be visual. Everyday equipment like doorbells or alarm clocks are of no use unless specially adapted. Speak clearly when talking to a deaf or hard of hearing person -do not shout - and you can both enjoy an exchange of news and views. Hearing loss does not mean loss of intelligence, and deaf and hard of hearing people want to communicate as much as everyone else. The installation of induction loops in public buildings is enabling people with hearing aids to share in that communication. Hearing impairment can date from birth, be caused by illness, be a result of ageing, or prolonged exposure to excessive noise, particularly in heavy industry. Stephen Crampton

Scan of the booklet cover, back image

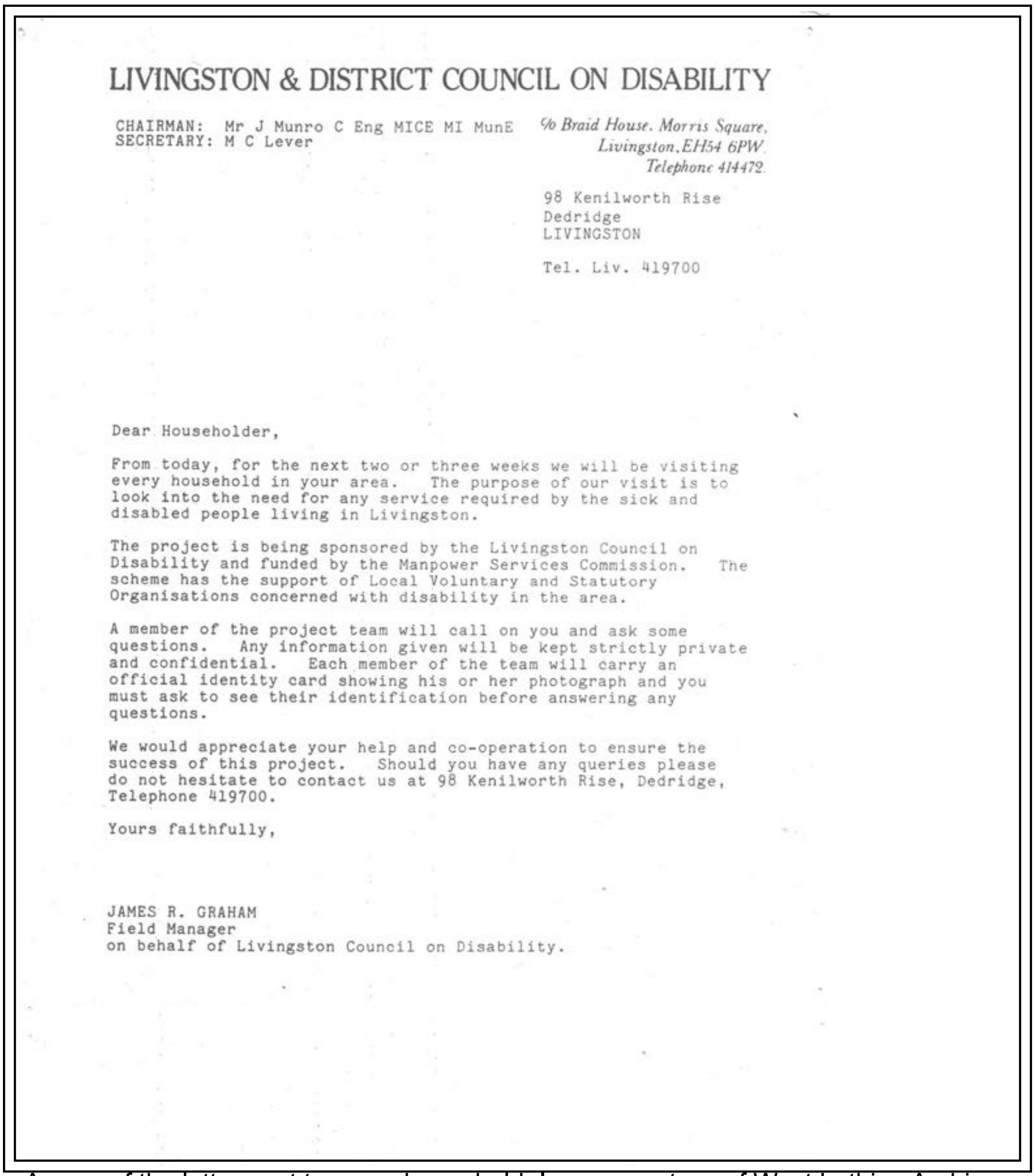
In 1983, Livingston and District Council on Disability thought it would be in everybody's interest to have a 'fairly accurate measure of the extent of disability in the district and considered that a survey should be undertaken'.

The Livingston Access Survey wanted to provide impetus to enable local action in the community and also to provide a database establishing the need for employment opportunities for people with a disability within West Lothian.

The completed report contained a wealth of information and statistical analysis of the incidence of disability in the district as well as the needs of people with a disability in respect of the services that were available to them from statutory and voluntary organisations and agencies operating within the area.

At this time, this survey was ground-breaking and provided huge insight and led to the formation of the Livingston Council on Disability's Disabled Persons Project which aimed to consult with the appropriate organisations to work to provide more informed, co-ordinated and integrated services within the area for people with a disability.

Every household in Livingston district received a letter and survey, followed up by a visit from a project team member.



LIVINGSTON & DISTRICT COUNCIL ON DISABILITY

CHAIRMAN: Mr J Munro C Eng MICE MI MunE
SECRETARY: M C Lever

℅ Braid House. Morris Square,
Livingston, EH54 6PW.
Telephone 414472.

98 Kenilworth Rise
Dedridge
LIVINGSTON

Tel. Liv. 419700

Dear Householder,

From today, for the next two or three weeks we will be visiting every household in your area. The purpose of our visit is to look into the need for any service required by the sick and disabled people living in Livingston.

The project is being sponsored by the Livingston Council on Disability and funded by the Manpower Services Commission. The scheme has the support of Local Voluntary and Statutory Organisations concerned with disability in the area.

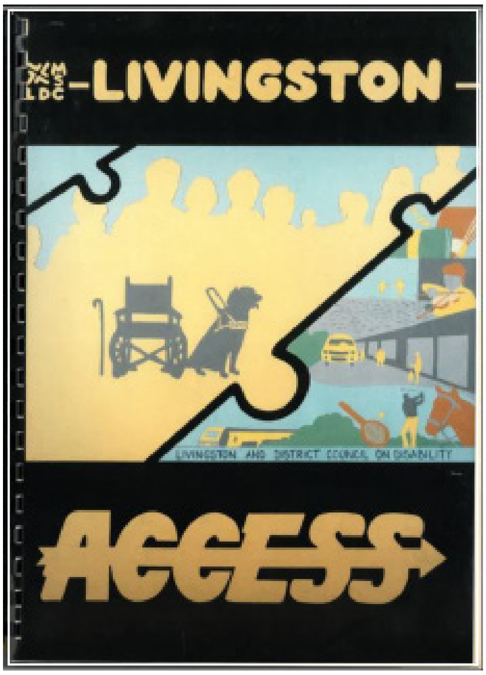
A member of the project team will call on you and ask some questions. Any information given will be kept strictly private and confidential. Each member of the team will carry an official identity card showing his or her photograph and you must ask to see their identification before answering any questions.

We would appreciate your help and co-operation to ensure the success of this project. Should you have any queries please do not hesitate to contact us at 98 Kenilworth Rise, Dedridge, Telephone 419700.

Yours faithfully,

JAMES R. GRAHAM
Field Manager
on behalf of Livingston Council on Disability.

A copy of the letter sent to every household. Image courtesy of West Lothian Archives



Livingston Access Booklet.
Image courtesy of Disability West Lothian

In 1983, the council along with the help of the Manpower Services Commission published the Livingston Access Survey. This was a huge step towards accessibility within the county and only a few years later the West Lothian Access Committee was formed to work with local groups and organisations to remove physical and attitudinal barriers to equality, and to promote all aspects of independent living within West Lothian.
The county also saw its first purpose-built wheelchair housing completed in Deans, Livingston, with similar housing built shortly afterwards in Ladywell and Craigshill.
The 1990s saw many more people with disabilities become more involved in fighting for better access within their communities and organisations around Britain such as DAN (Direct Action Network) who demonstrated against inaccessible public transport and buildings. This resulted in Government regulation increasing the onus on building owners to ensure that all public buildings were accessible and contained suitable facilities. This culminated in the 1995 Disability Discrimination Act, placing the duty on owners to ensure buildings were accessible and contained suitable facilities for all.

Scan of Housing Plan for proposed ‘Wheelchair Housing’,1983
Image courtesy of West Lothian Archives

Disability rights activists came together on both a national and local level looking for a response to the physical and social barriers that existed within their communities. National disability activist groups such as the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS) and the Disability Alliance were formed as were many on a local level including the Area 5 Action Group which went on to become The Action Group. The Action Group were involved in numerous campaigns in Scotland to improve services for people with a learning disability including a campaign for the closure of institutions such as Gogarburn Hospital.

Local Councils were increasingly recognising the importance of people with a disability having an input into the running of community facilities, services and the creation of local legislation and as such disability forums were being called upon to share their views and ideas.
In 1997, West Lothian Council held a “Have Your Say Day” at the Howden Park Centre to encourage people to share their views about how community care services are planned, which contributed to the council’s West Lothian Community Plan. These types of events were to continue over the years with many disability groups and forums shaping decisions that were being made in community planning.

Lothian Special Olympics Team 1990. Image Courtesy of Disability West Lothian

The millennium saw even more inclusion for people with a disability to take part in sport with 32 West Lothian Athletes taking part in the Special Olympics UK national games - bringing home a total of 45 medals.

The 1990s saw a more community involvement for people with hidden disabilities such as cinemas and supermarkets having more autism friendly environments and the launch of an annual Mental Health Day at the Strathbrock Partnership Centre, which opened in 2002.
Strathbrock was the first of its kind in Scotland offering council, health and community facilities under one roof, which included a mental health day centre and Café Mistura which is operated by Capability Scotland as a training café for adults with a learning disability and was open to the public.

"The majority of the community I think, respected people with disabilities. They might not have understood what your disability was, or what your needs were. But I think they…the community I was brought up with, the majority, took me for who I was. Even nowadays when I go back to Broxburn people say, 'Oh Gordon, how are you doing?' I'm well known in my old community.
Gordon, 53, born with Cerebral Palsy on community attitudes.

The Parliament Building Consultation Group 2001 with members of West Lothian Access Committee.
Image courtesy of Disability West Lothian

In 1992, West Lothian Council made available an Access Fund for organisations to make changes and improvements and the Access Committee continued to advise and support on accessibility to the built environment as well as launching a series of good practice awards for local businesses and organisations.

"Swimming pools were accessible for me because they had a hoist for getting in and out of the pool. Broxburn [Leisure Centre] put in an accessible cubicle and made it bigger. So they did quite a lot. I used swimming pools about once a week or more."

Moira, 53, Livingston. Born with Cerebral Palsy and member of the Access Committee.

Moira
Image courtesy of Moira Mungall

The Disability Discrimination Act (1995) brought about major reform concerning the nature of accessibility as it placed a duty on landlords, businesses, and property owners to take measures to make their buildings accessible for all.

The 2000s saw a major shift in building and planning attitudes and the idea of 'universal design' emerged which believed that instead of adding special facilities to a 'normal' building – they should be designed to ensure that any person with any disability could use every part of the building. West Lothian saw the construction of such places including the Ability Centre in Carmondean and Quigley House in Craigshill.

Guide Hall in Linlithgow receiving a cheque to make for access ramps and disabled toilets in 1994. Image Courtesy of West Lothian Courier.

"I did Brownies, Guides, First Aid, Sunday School and church. They were normal groups and I had a disability, but went with my friends, but accessibility of the hall was a bit difficult with steps and stairs, stone steps and that.

Most difficulty I had was getting there, if I didn't have my Dad or my friend's Dad to help me into places. Nobody would take me in to places. So you had to rely on your parents and friend's parents who knew how to help you. I had a very pleasant early childhood."

Moira, 53, on accessibility in her childhood

“We helped to design the Ability Centre at Carmondean. The Council and Head Injuries, and Disability West Lothian were in a purpose-built unit and we had everything to hand.” Moira, 53, Access Committee member

Starting construction on The Ability Centre. Photo shows local councillors and representatives from the groups who were going to use the new centre. Photo courtesy of the West Lothian Courier (2000)

The Ability Centre, Image courtesy of West Lothian Council.

Chess club at the Ability Centre. Image courtesy of The Daily Record.

The Ability Centre in Carmondean, Livingston was purpose-built to accommodate a range of services for adults with a physical disability.

The building, opened in 2001 by quadruple amputee mountaineer Jamie Andrew, provided a spacious, bright and accessible environment for several services and organisations who were based there including Disability West Lothian, West Lothian Community Rehabilitation and Brain Injury Service (CRABIS). The Sensory Resource Centre and Livingston North Housing Office. The large double-height building was also home to a social café, library, and served as a base for many local community groups.

In 2002 it was awarded a charter mark in recognition of excellence in public service and two years later it hosted the first Jamie Andrew Award ceremony. These awards included ‘Achievement of the Year’ to recognise the contribution to their community made by people with a disability in West Lothian and also the ‘Good Access Award’ which were presented to local businesses and organisations whose products or services were accessible by all.

Jamie Andrew Awards at the Ability Centre in 2005. Image courtesy Disability West Lothian.

“The Ability Centre has been a really good thing for me. It got me out of the house, interacting with people with the same disability, people with other disabilities. And got me in contact with people who had been through similar things to myself.”

James, 36, on attending the Ability Centre

“We’re lucky in West Lothian to have a big voluntary sector and third sector, we’ve had a lot of organisations, like Disability West Lothian, who have put a power of work into making life better, and the Ability Centre as well, so there was a lot of good work. There’s a desire here, in my opinion, to make it better for you.” Colin, 53, Livingston. Diagnosed with Autism as an adult.

Attitudes towards disability were beginning to change as long stay hospitals and institutions were beginning to close and many people with a disability were living in their own homes within the community. There was also a shift towards people with a disability having better opportunities to become more involved in their local communities.

In Bathgate, a new youth club was formed for 12 to 18 year olds known as the PHAB Club (Physically Handicapped and Able Bodied which went on to become known as FABB – Facilitating Access Breaking Barriers) and offered social facilities and events to young people in the area. In 2002 they launched their youth exchange programme which saw them visit and host similar groups from Germany and Italy over the years.

Members of Bathgate FABB club. Image courtesy of Bathgate FABB Club

Access to local communities was also becoming better – in 1991 the Edinburgh and Lothian Shopmobility Scheme began as a mobile facility that transported electric scooters and wheelchairs to specific locations where they could be loaned to people with mobility issues while they did their shopping.

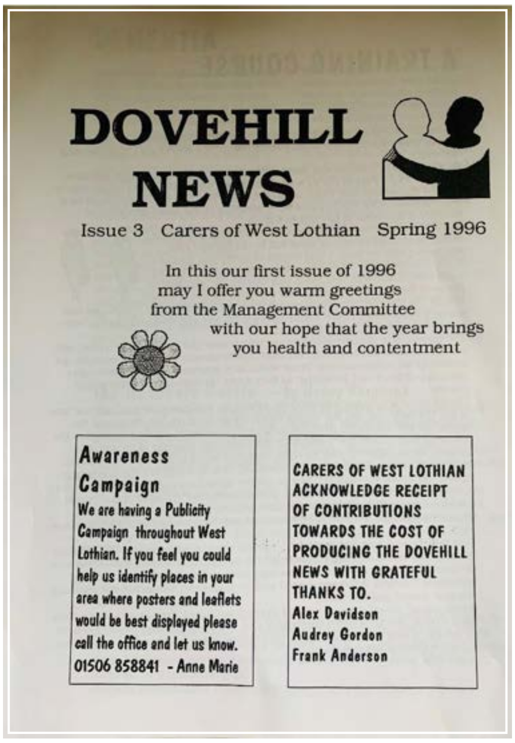
Two years later, Bathgate town centre had its own Shop-mobility scheme and in 1996 it became available at the Almondvale Shopping Centre.

Leisure and sports facilities were also becoming more accessible as 1995 saw the launch of the Countryside for All Campaign where rangers at local country parks in West Lothian were holding ‘Come and try’ sessions to encourage people regardless of age or ability to try activities.

The following year, West Lothian Council was one of the first local authorities to be accepted onto the Royal Mail’s Ready, Willing and Able for Sport programme, whereby sporting opportunities for people with a disability were promoted and encouraged through taster sessions and the formation of accessible clubs and groups.

“At that time, I don’t remember the word being used, and there were certainly no help given, and certainly no financial help given, to her or to me. It was just something in those days you were expected to take on.”
Frances, 80, on becoming a carer for her mother.

Around this time, the government began to recognise the importance of the role that carers of people with a disability or long term health condition played within their communities, and in 1996 carers rights were established in law through the Carers Recognition and Services Act.
Six years previously in West Lothian Carers of West Lothian had been formed by a small group of people, themselves carers, who recognised the need carers had for information and support and set up an office base at the Dovehill Centre in Uphall providing information and advice.
The organisation continued to grow over the years and became a well-established voluntary organisation offering a range of services to meet the needs of carers and their families within West Lothian.



DOVEHILL NEWS

Issue 3 Carers of West Lothian Spring 1996

In this our first issue of 1996
may I offer you warm greetings
from the Management Committee
with our hope that the year brings
you health and contentment

Awareness Campaign
We are having a Publicity Campaign throughout West Lothian. If you feel you could help us identify places in your area where posters and leaflets would be best displayed please call the office and let us know.
01506 858841 - Anne Marie

CARERS OF WEST LOTHIAN ACKNOWLEDGE RECEIPT OF CONTRIBUTIONS TOWARDS THE COST OF PRODUCING THE DOVEHILL NEWS WITH GRATEFUL THANKS TO.
Alex Davidson
Audrey Gordon
Frank Anderson

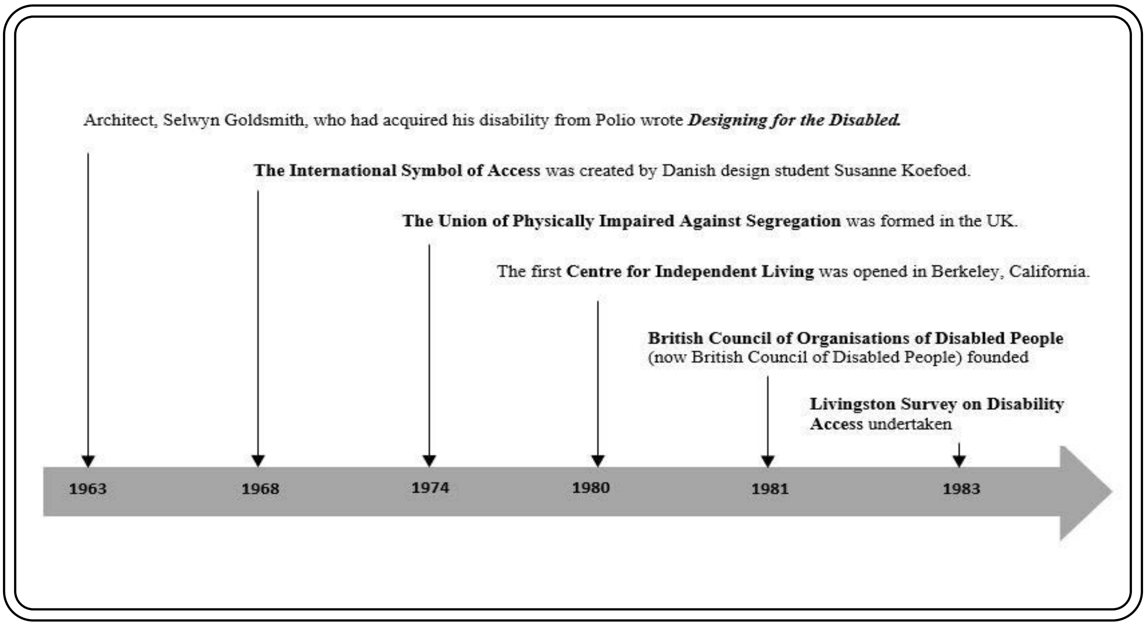
Carers of West Lothian Newsletter, Dovehill News 1995. Image Courtesy of Carers of West Lothian.

“I don’t have a social life, it wasn’t too bad when she was younger but obviously when you start to go to toddlers groups...I was realising that Cat wasn’t progressing to the same degree as other children in the vicinity, I was starting to pull back. I could feel myself getting quite upset about what was happening, well what wasn’t happening for her.
And I know that she didn’t have friends, so she didn’t have links to anybody else, you know, so it did become more difficult and it’s actually become more difficult the older she’s become, for me, she has the best life out [laughs] ah sometimes wish it was me that was in her position because she doesn’t have to worry about anything in her life.” Aileen, on life as a carer to her daughter.

Isolation was a common experience for the carers that we spoke to:

“I think it does tend to isolate you a wee bit, I think Peter was probably more able to be involved with community based projects than I was - I think my time was a real restriction on what I was involved in. I had friends and I spent good quality time with friends and family but as far as community time I don’t think I had the time to do that because when I stopped working - I then became my husband’s carer.” Jo, 68, Carer for her husband who took a stroke.

Timeline of accessibility to the built environment



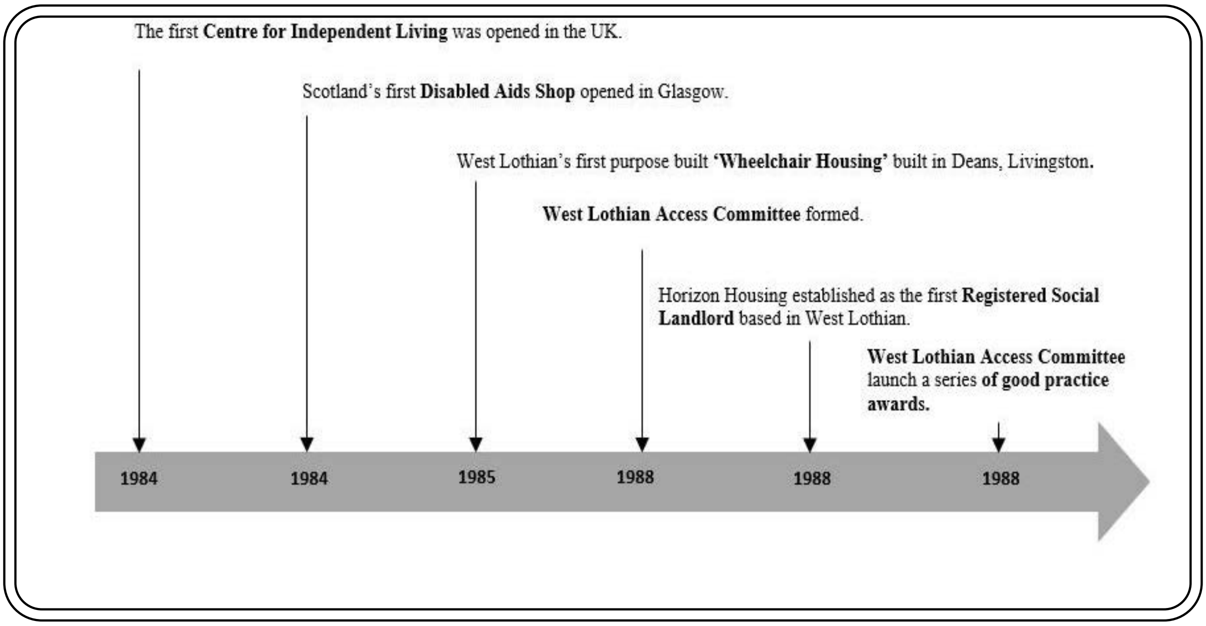
"I was more mobile when I was a teenager, if I had been in a wheelchair, I probably would have found it more frustrating as places wouldn't have been very accessible. If you go down Broxburn Main Street nowadays most of the shops are the same with a step into it. Or if you can get into the shop there's no much room. The pubs – not one of them has an accessible toilet, if you are in a wheelchair. You may be able to get a pint at the bar, but if you need the toilet you can't go." Gordon M, 53, born with Cerebral Palsy on accessibility within his community.


Gordon

By the end of the Second World War, there were over 300,000 disabled people added to the existing UK population and issues of mobility and access in towns soon became apparent.

A young architect called Selwyn Goldsmith, who had become disabled in 1956 from contracting polio, identified the country's 'architectural disability' and devoted his life to fighting the 'individual discrimination of buildings' which placed barriers in the way of any person who had difficulty entering them.
In 1963, he wrote Designing for the Disabled, which was the first guidance on disability access, which soon became invaluable to architects and local authority planners. The following year he surveyed 284 people with mobility issues asking which types of buildings should be made easier for people with a disability to use, he soon discovered the highest priority was public toilets followed by restaurants, local shops and churches.

Timeline of accessibility to the built environment



In the following decade, there was a rise in the Independent Living Movement in the UK and as such, people with a disability sought solutions to overcoming restricted lifestyles and living conditions. Around this time Livingston celebrated its 25th Anniversary as a new town and place of activity.
The Livingston and District Council on Disability, which ran from 1983-1987, felt that it was important that people who lived and visited the town, including those with a disability, were informed as to the means of access to all of its buildings and services, so undertook a huge Access Survey.

The 1970s saw the introduction of the first accessible public toilets in the UK and several new housing associations emerged, with more accessible and wheelchair friendly homes becoming available.

Aileen Liddell lives in Torphicen, a small rural village in West Lothian, she has a daughter, Cat who has mobility issues due to her disability. Aileen shares with us her experiences of trying to make her village more accessible and inclusive.

"Torphicen is a [laughs] very old village right enough! I've had to ask them to put dropped kerbs in and I keep asking them, they put a path round the park...an ash pit path a couple of years ago, and it's lovely, it's great because more people are using the park but there's only one entrance if you've got a wheelchair, the other entrance has got steps and I've asked them to ramp it. There's another entrance that would be accessible but you can't actually turn a wheelchair into it. So it can be a bit problematic, especially if you want to go to the community centre and you can see the community centre from your house but you've got to go all the way round the village to get to it when you're in a wheelchair."

"I asked about four years ago if they could ramp the steps and the council said they had no budget. Took it to the councillors, and they said they would put it on a list of items to be done then said "we'll put heritage lampposts in" [laughs] you know, make the place look pretty [laughs].I was angry, so I asked again "oh they don't have funds" so they added fancy heritage signs...[laughs] Then they had a village improvement fund, so I asked the community council if they would pay to get that done and they said they'd already arranged for the funds to be used to put an extra bit of path in to link to the bus stop area in the village, which was needed but that's the area that you can't actually turn the wheelchair into the path [laughs]."

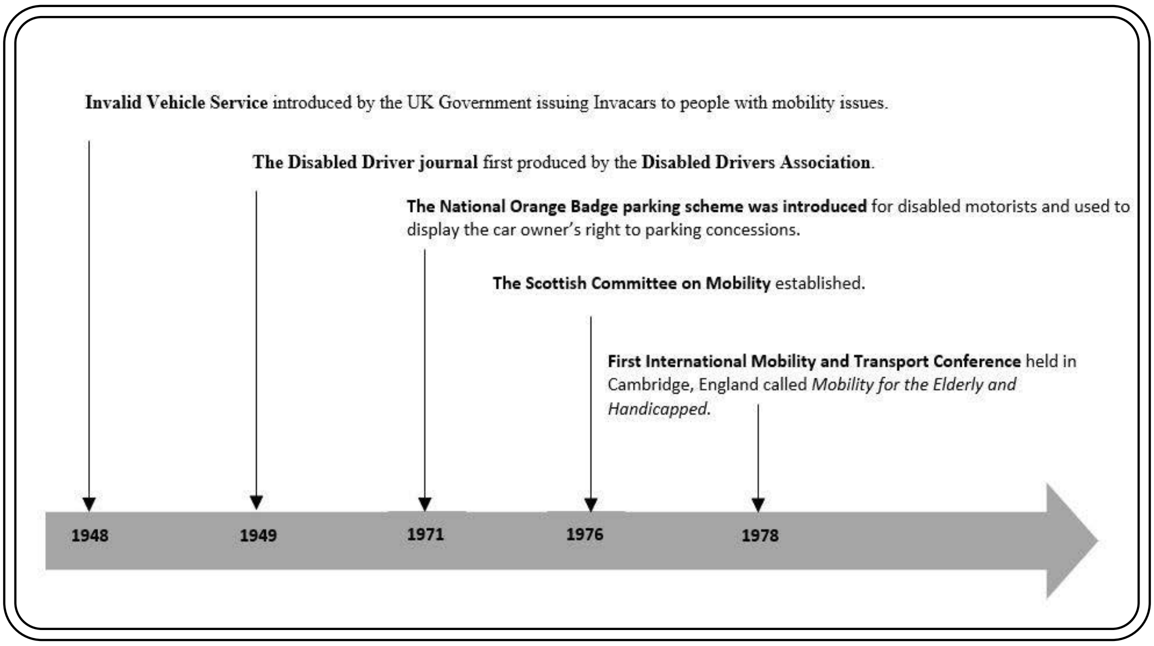
Cat at the Gala day.
Image courtesy of
Aileen Liddell

Cat and Aileen at the Bower. Image courtesy of
Aileen Liddell.

"I've raised awareness where possible of people with disabilities, even like the gala day committee and things, sitting on that when Cat was actually in the Gala day…they hadn't thought of how's she going to get onto the stage, it was just "rather than having steps, put a ramp up rather than everyone can get on apart from Cat."

"If they're not coming across it on a regular basis they're not gonna start thinking "let's include those people."

Timeline of accessibility to Transport



Invalid Vehicle Service introduced by the UK Government issuing Invacars to people with mobility issues.

The Disabled Driver journal first produced by the **Disabled Drivers Association**.

The National Orange Badge parking scheme was introduced for disabled motorists and used to display the car owner's right to parking concessions.

The Scottish Committee on Mobility established.

First International Mobility and Transport Conference held in Cambridge, England called *Mobility for the Elderly and Handicapped.*

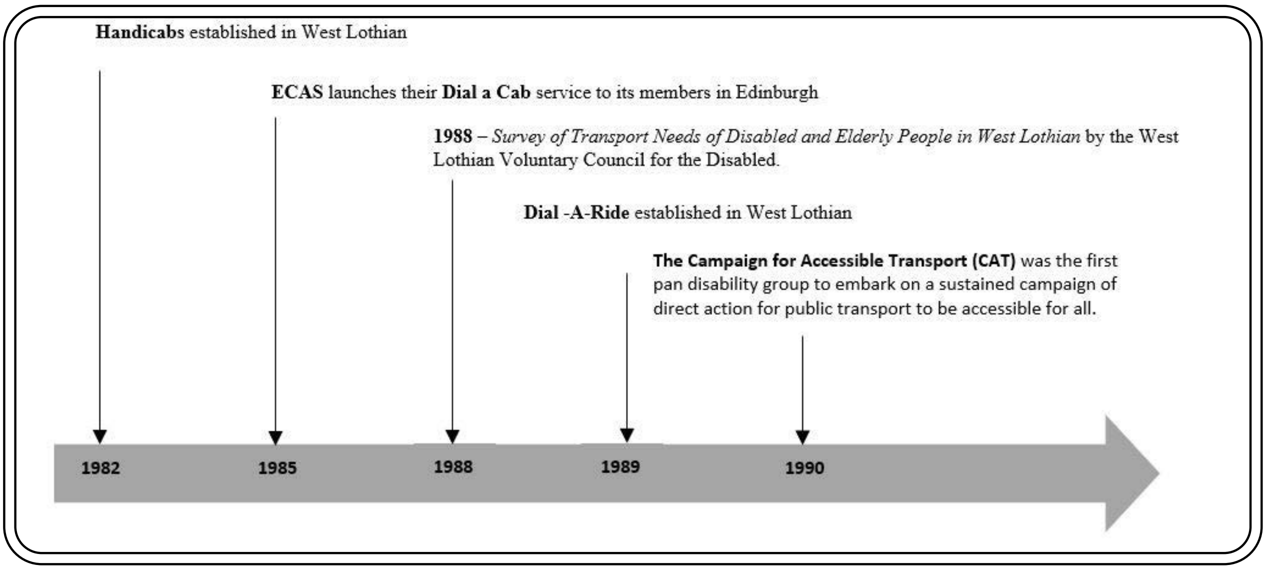
"Buses – it was all steps, quite high steps. For some reason, buses always seemed busy and it was always a nightmare trying to get a seat on buses."
Gordon, 53, on accessing public transport as a young man.

Before the end of WW2 access to transport for people with a physical disability was extremely limited and unaided travel on public transport almost impossible, so in 1948 the British Government introduced the Invalid Vehicle Service, issuing free three wheeler blue trikes to people with mobility issues to provide a means of independent travel. Production of the cars ceased by the mid 70s and was replaced with a Mobility Allowance - a financial benefit that allowed recipients to choose the best way of meeting their mobility needs, whether by driving a car, using taxis or getting a mobility scooter.

Although a positive advance, it soon became clear that it was not enough to buy and run even the smallest car so the Motability Scheme was introduced the following year which aimed to provide charitable grants to people with a disability, who would not otherwise be able to afford the vehicle or adaptations they needed.

Launch of Motability Scheme in 1978.
Image courtesy of Motaclarity.

Timeline of accessibility to Transport



Handicabs established in West Lothian

ECAS launches their **Dial a Cab** service to its members in Edinburgh

1988 – *Survey of Transport Needs of Disabled and Elderly People in West Lothian* by the West Lothian Voluntary Council for the Disabled.

Dial -A-Ride established in West Lothian

The Campaign for Accessible Transport (CAT) was the first pan disability group to embark on a sustained campaign of direct action for public transport to be accessible for all.

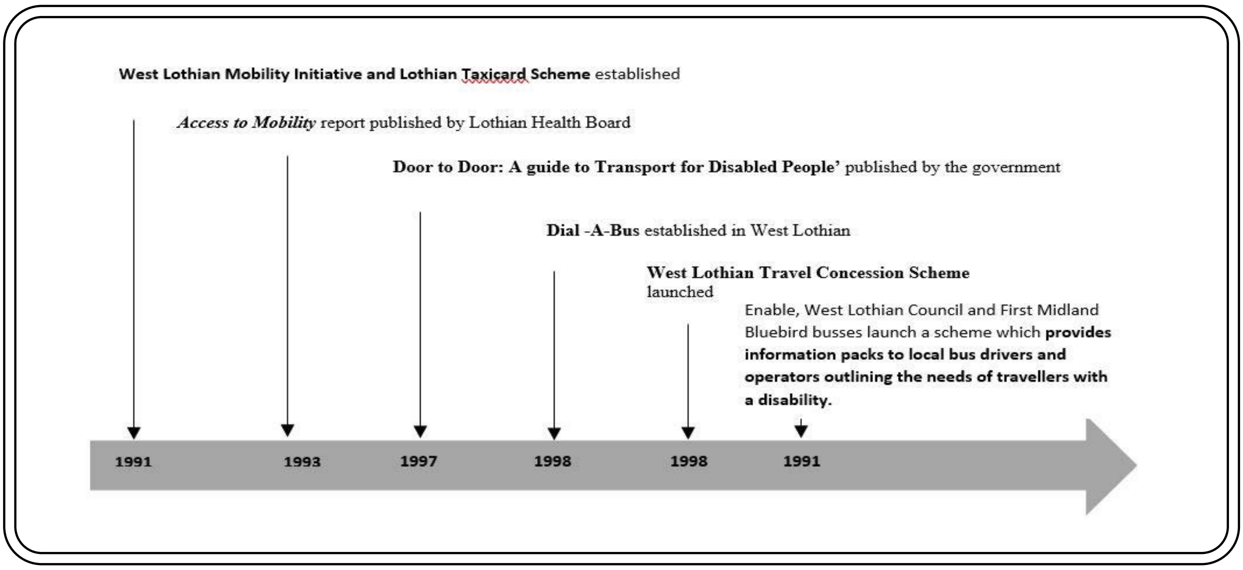
In 1976, the Scottish Committee on Mobility held a major conference on Transport for Special Needs to address the issues concerning transport accessibility and it was apparent that changes needed to be made.
The start of the following decade saw the launch of the Dial-a-Cab scheme for members of the Edinburgh Cripple Aid Society (now ECAS) that offered a subsidized fare for its members and was the first of its kind in Scotland.

Despite the popularity of the scheme at this time, it did not suit the needs of all and for many people with mobility issues, public transport was just not possible. Accessible transport began to become available in Britain throughout the 70s and 80s, although these were usually operated by voluntary or community groups or through local authority social services.

The scheme proved immensely popular and by 1982, Handicabs was established throughout the Lothians that provided wheelchair accessible taxis for people with a disability that could not use public transport or have access to private cars.
West Lothian, like the rest of the Lothian region, saw the creation of a Dial-a-ride service in 1989, which provided a door to door transport service to people with limited mobility. Three years later came the arrival of the West Lothian Mobility Initiative, which was launched with the aim supporting people with mobility issues to access transport within the county.

Dial-a-Cab Photo courtesy of ECAS

Timeline of accessibility to Transport



"Initially, we had our own car but it was a saloon car and I found it quite difficult to lift the wheelchair on my own and get it into the boot of the car, so when we heard about the Motability scheme we decided to go for the car and we chose...deliberately chose, an estate type car because it was easier for me to lift the wheelchair in and out from the car."
Jo M, 66, Armadale. Carer for her husband who took a stroke.

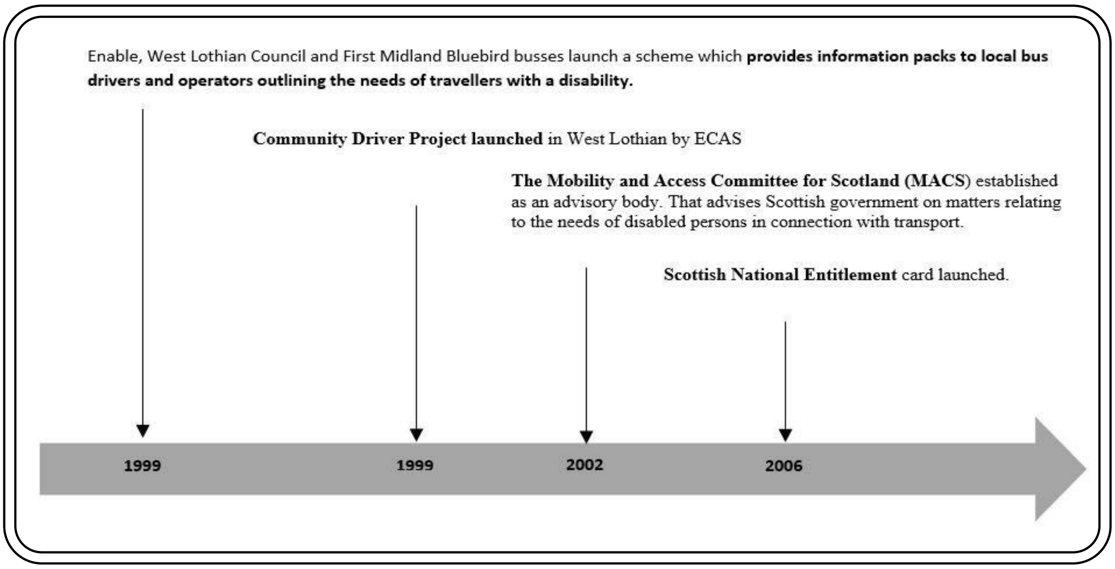
The 1990s saw the formation of the Campaign for Accessible Transport (CAT) the first pan-disability group to embark on a sustained campaign of direct action for better access to transport for people with mobility issues, as such the government and local councils began to look into the problems facing many people using public transport.


Direct Action Activists
Image courtesy of The People's Museum.

Accessible community transport within West Lothian continued to play an important role within the county but was struggling to meet demand, and in 1997, the Council commissioned Lothian Community Transport Service (LCTS) to undertake a Report on Community Transport in West Lothian.

In 1993, Lothian Health Board, which incorporated the counties of East, Mid and West Lothian, published a report entitled Access to Mobility which reviewed the public transport issues that faced people with a disability in the Lothian Region. Increased funding was made available to help tackle some of the existing inequalities and this decade gave rise to many new initiatives. The number of wheelchair accessible taxis in the county grew considerably and the council launched Lothian Taxicards, which provided a subsidy on the fares of people who required such taxis to travel.

Timeline of accessibility to Transport



Enable, West Lothian Council and First Midland Bluebird busses launch a scheme which **provides information packs to local bus drivers and operators outlining the needs of travellers with a disability.**

Community Driver Project launched in West Lothian by ECAS

The Mobility and Access Committee for Scotland (MACS) established as an advisory body. That advises Scottish government on matters relating to the needs of disabled persons in connection with transport.

Scottish National Entitlement card launched.

They identified that one major issue is that local voluntary sector minibus operators experienced significant difficulties in recruiting suitably trained volunteer drivers. After further discussions with the council, LCTS resolved to concentrate its energies in West Lothian around the development of a Community Driver Project to meet the needs identified in the report.

In 1999, Bathgate’s Local Volunteer Enterprise (now the Voluntary Sector Gateway) partnered with LCTS to take the project forward in providing the Minibus Driver Awareness Scheme (MiDAS) and other relevant training to volunteer drivers who were then placed with appropriate groups throughout West Lothian.

It was also around this time that the council funded, Dial-a-Bus service was launched, whose aim was to take people with mobility issues from their homes to local shopping centres. This service had already been running in Mid and East Lothian from 1990 and became established in West Lothian eight years later.

LCTS Community minibus
Photo courtesy of Lothian Community Transport Services (LCTS)

It was not just physical barriers that were being addressed at this time but also attitudinal as in 1999 West Lothian Council, in partnership with Enable and First Midland Bluebird buses, provided information packs to local bus drivers and operators that outlined the needs of travellers with a disability and how they may be supported.

"I went on the bus a few times, but they didn't have any ramps at that time, so it was quite difficult to get on and off. The buses have now changed with ramps and drivers come out, or they press a button and it comes out automatically." Moira, 53.Talks about using public transport in her childhood.

2001 saw the passing of the Transport (Scotland) Act 2001 which recognised the need for the issues that affect disabled people when using transport to be highlighted to the government and as such the Mobility and Access Committee for Scotland was launched who have been active in pushing for much legislation to make public transport accessible for all.

"I think, over the years, it's getting slowly better, but there is still probably gaps there for certain accessible vehicles."
Jorden, 36, Whitburn. Manager (day services for people with physical disabilities.)

"It was a monster!"

Billy W, 65, Torphican. Owner of an AC Invacar.

In 1946, the first accessible motor-driven trike was invented by engineer Bert Greeves for his paralysed cousin, he went on to establish the Invacar company and by 1948, the British Government began a service where they supplied and repaired these motorised tricycles, giving them free of charge to those who were eligible. The cars were motorised trikes with a fibreglass shell designed for one person with space for a folded wheelchair. The government scheme, under the Ministry of Health, saw them as prosthetics, believing the role of the NHS as being there to get you mobile.

The AC Invacar. Image courtesy of www.3-wheelers.com

"It wasn't Motability at that time it was…it was the government scheme around the trikes, and it was based in Astley Ainsley, with the garage for them down at Gorgie Road. They came out and they measured the distance between my house, which was at top end of the village, to the garage at the other end of the village, and said if I could walk that distance I didn't need a car. So again, in came Mr Dalziel 'William needs a car', so I was tested, sent to Astley Ainsley [hospital in Edinburgh] and [they] put me in this vehicle, gave me three hours training around the hospital grounds…I passed that, they handed me the keys and says 'right on you go' 'on you go where?' I says 'take it back home?' I says 'after three hours?' So I had to drive this monster from there all the way back to Bathgate, then Torphichen."

The scheme proved extremely popular and by the 1970's thousands of Invacars were on the roads, however, over the years it had become noticeably clear that these cars were not particularly safe.

"I mean it was like a motorbike and you had throttle here, gear shift here, which was neutral, reverse and forward and that was it, and a 500 flat twin cylinder engine. Everybody thought 'oh, it only goes at 30 mile an hour' it didn't! It's maximum speed was 70! So everybody, when you came to a T-junction and you were coming out, somebody would always [does action to show someone speeding past] screaming past you, cause they thought 'plenty time it's only a disabled car'...I managed to get myself through the streets of Edinburgh and I was terrified! Because your steering, like this [does action] like a motorbike, and to break it you had to push down on the lever, you had indicators here [points] There was no heater, no radio, no insulation of any kind and it was so light that, my own brother could easily lift the whole car to shoulder length, at the front, it was so light, made of fibreglass. It was a heap, and I managed to get it home, by that time I was

working in Peffermill (Blindcraft) but I was so afraid, what I'd do is I'd take it to Bathgate, park it in Bathgate, and get the bus to Edinburgh, from Bathgate. I was too terrified to take it into the city"

"It was a killer that car, it really was, it was a killer. Even Graham Hill, the racing driver, he said exactly the same thing he took one round Brands Hatch for Lord Snowdon and… he said it was "terrible, terrifying". He and Lord Snowdon had campaigned to get rid of these awful cars, because they really were awful. As I said I have lost friends....he was in a car smash and his car exploded, another lad, his brother went around the corner right up the back of an artic, and his brother was sitting in an orange crate, at the side of him. There was only one seat in the car and of course, they were both killed…it was quite sad."

Tam takes up the cause for disabled drivers

Mr Tam Dalyell has presented a petition concerning the phasing out of invalid cars to the Department of Health and Social Security on behalf of the people of West Lothian.

The petition called for the Secretary of State to guarantee continued independent mobility when the trikes are no longer available, the restoration of an invalid vehicle service alongside the Mobility Scheme, and the promotion of projects to design and produce specialised vehicles.

Mr Alfred Morris, Minister for the Disabled, said that it was the Government's aim to make sure that no-one who is now mobile is made immobile by the phasing out of the invalid trike.

He added that providing cash would help more disabled people to choose a form of mobility best suited to their individual needs.

Protests against Invacars 1977 West Lothian Courier Image Courtesy of British Newspaper Archives.

Disability campaigners fought to remove these vehicles from the road as not only were they felt to be dangerous, but they were 'antisocial' and did not meet the needs of people with a disability who had families.

"If you'd ever got the chance to drive one, you would soon know, it was horrifying, especially in bad weather. I remember, worst I got was, you know where the Halls is?... I was on my way to Edinburgh, driving along, this lorry came, shooting past me and it was really bad roads, and the slipstream sucked me right up behind him. I couldn't get out because all the other cars had left 2 tracks on the road and there was this one track in the middle where the snow had splashed, right, and my front wheel was stuck in it, so where it went, I went!
Of course, because the lorry was going so fast he was pulling me along with him, I went into a skid, went right round like this [motions with hands] my back wheel hit the kerb and I rolled up the kerb and the roof just caved in on me and the back window wrapped round my head like a book [laughs]. I had to walk into Broxburn and got to the police station there and said 'excuse me I'm sorry but I've erm, want to report an accident,
'what kind of accident?'
'well I've wrecked my Invalid carriage...it's on the grass outside Halls'.
They didn't care."

A disabled person's car gets a push in the snow in Edinburgh. © The Scotsman Publications Ltd.

Lord Snowdon, with the help of the racing driver, Graham Hill did much to support the campaign – stating in Parliament in 1974 that he believed that the three-wheeler should be phased out in favour of a production car that could be adapted to suit the needs of any disabled driver. Across the country many protests took place for disabled people to have better support with mobility, however, the Invacars remained popular with many disabled drivers.

The protests against the dangerous cars were nationwide, and Billy took part in the Scottish demonstrations.

"We'd drive up to the Scottish office, or we would go down to different places, I remember driving up and signs hanging out the window and stuff like that, there was a lot, there was hundreds of us, we were all in the same boat, we were all different kinds, but it was actually Lord Snowdon and his efforts to change the law that had it removed, I don't think the government cared.
In Edinburgh we used to go in convoys of those things [laughs] those wee cars, blocking roads and…way back in the seventies, that was scary enough because traffic then would either breakdown or, we had one was hit wi a car, oh god it was a nightmare but it was basically to tell people that they were seriously stupid, why do you give the piece of junk to somebody who's already got a disability…it was a death trap!"

Billy shares some fonder memories of his experiences with the Invacar.

"They were too centralised, steering was too centralised, they were too light, you had no heating, no radio, no nothing, nO passengers...I mean I got caught taking passengers, but I think there were so many in the car that the procurator fiscal threw it out. I was going to a party and I got caught with about 5 people in the car, 5 people in that dinky wee...they were stretched over the back of me, they were sitting at either side of me…and I was in the middle steering! [laughs]. The police…they thought it was amusing to be honest, but they did lay charges before the procurator fiscal!"

Billy in the 80s
Image courtesy of Billy Wilson

Billy in recent years with a more reliable mobility scooter!
Image courtesy of Billy Wilson.

Billy's love of music led to him making a few adjustments of his own...

"I was young and I did enjoy what I did, that wee three wheeler for instance. I was stupid enough to put flexible aerials on it and put a radio on it, and I cross wired it and it melted, it cut right through it like a cheese wire [laughs] It was only a wee box, it was like a glove box at the back of the seat, wasn't room for anything else and I used a red hot poker to make the holes in the back of the car to fit the aerials in, unbelievable!"

The Motor Industry Research Association crash tested an invalid tricycle back in 1974 and found that it failed the then minimum standards and in July 1976, the Government announced that the vehicles would be phased out with the Mobility Allowance replacing it. This was a new cash benefit, introduced by the Government to allow recipients to choose the best way of meeting their mobility needs, whether driving a car, using taxis or getting a mobility scooter.

Getting the Invacars off the road was a lengthy process with the final government owned vehicles only being recalled and scrapped in 2000, 44 years after the scheme had been abandoned.

"Education was good, but you were limited in what you got taught...at that point, I didn't have much option…When I was a kid, you just done what you were told…I was hoping to stay on at school, but the school said, 'it's no for you son." Gordon, 53, on attending a 'special school'

Education for most young people with a disability, before the Second World War, was inconsistent. Many attended 'special schools' or segregated classes within mainstream schooling with little opportunity to learn or develop and some children were sent away to residential institutions, often far from their homes and family.

By the end of the Second World War, the Board of Education issued the paper Education After the War, which resulted in the 1945 Education (Scotland) Act. This new act now placed the responsibility of pupils with a disability in the hands of the Local Education Authorities. These authorities assessed all children with a disability and several categories of 'impairment' were introduced. It was thought that children who were blind, deaf, epileptic, had a physical disability or communication difficulties and were seriously 'disabled' must be educated in special schools.

Partially deaf children are sharing one microphone between two at Dawson Park school. Miss Woods speaks to them and they reply through their microphone so that they can hear what they are saying, 1957 © Newsquest (Herald & Times).

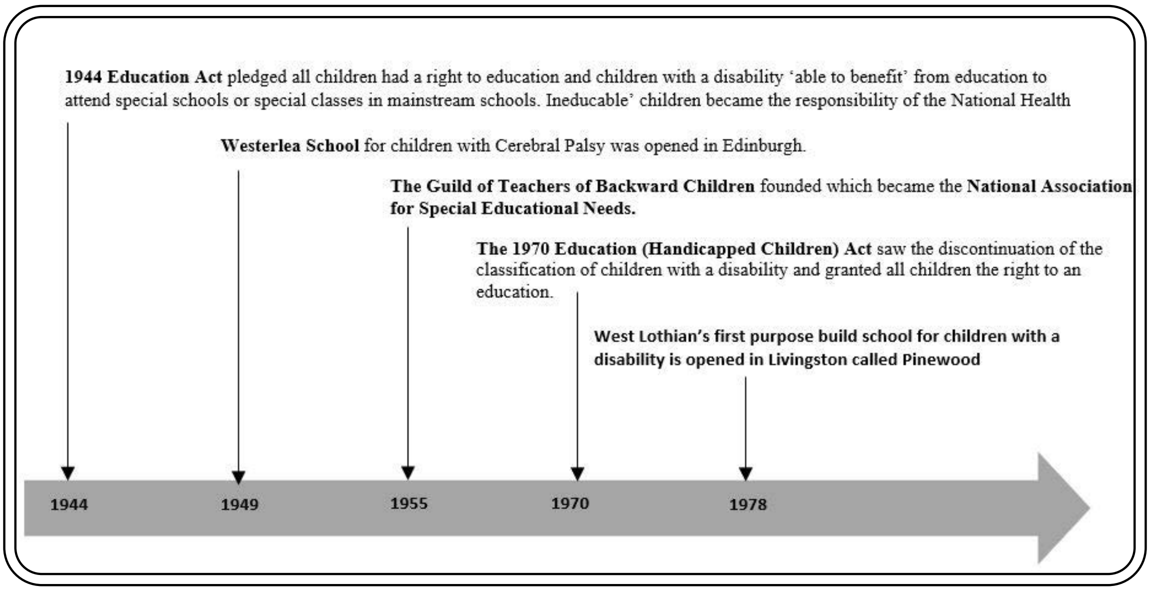
It was hoped that the majority of other categories (such as "delicate" "diabetic" or "partially sighted") would receive their education in mainstream schools. However, due to overcrowding in ordinary schools, prejudice, misinterpretations of the law and teacher resistance, this did not always take place.

Children with a learning disability were often kept separate from the other pupils:

"They came from various places in West Lothian, they came by bus, I think they travelled on their own, from what I recall. And they were kept physically separate, in a different building in school grounds, and had a teacher exclusively just for them, and they spent all day every day with that teacher. These were children with what we now call learning difficulties, and they stayed there until their leaving school age, which was one year longer than the normal school leaving age……they didn't really join in with the rest of the school."

Frances, 80, remembers the special class at her village school.

Timeline of access to education for disabled children



1944 Education Act pledged all children had a right to education and children with a disability 'able to benefit' from education to attend special schools or special classes in mainstream schools. Ineducable' children became the responsibility of the National Health

Westerlea School for children with Cerebral Palsy was opened in Edinburgh.

The Guild of Teachers of Backward Children founded which became the **National Association for Special Educational Needs.**

The 1970 Education (Handicapped Children) Act saw the discontinuation of the classification of children with a disability and granted all children the right to an education.

West Lothian's first purpose build school for children with a disability is opened in Livingston called Pinewood

Several new special schools were opened, with many providing a nurturing environment and good education for the children who attended, however, a number of these were more focused on training and discipline rather than education. Many of these special schools, accessible to children in West Lothian, were out with the county, which often meant travel into Edinburgh by taxi or bus.

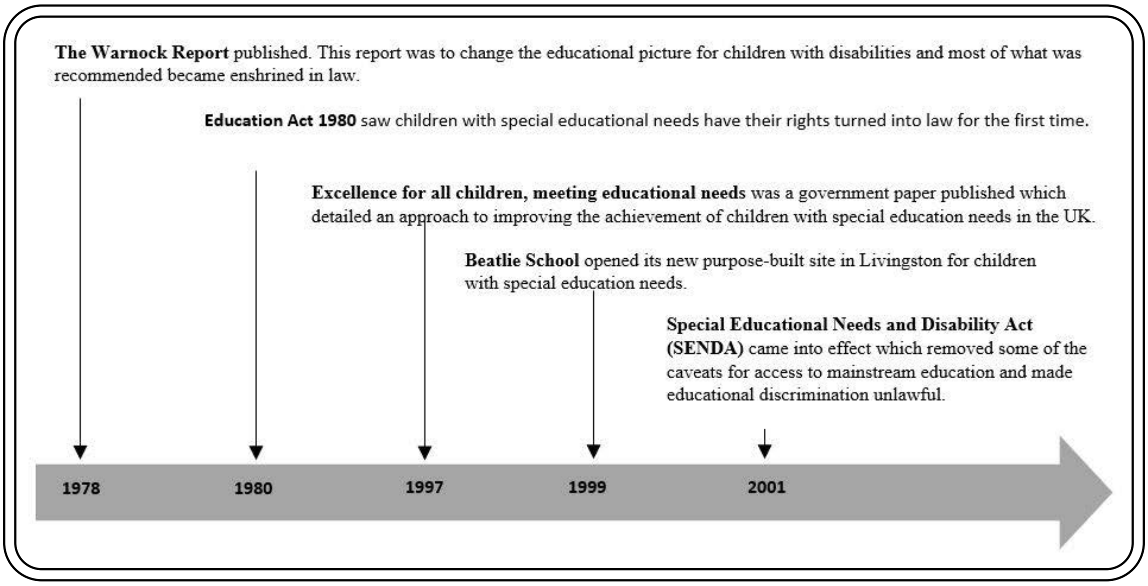
Westerlea School for Disabled children
– little girl races across the room
- © The Scotsman Publications Ltd.

These schools included:

- Winchburgh Special School (West Lothian)
- Mid Calder Special School (West Lothian)
- Oakbank Special School (West Lothian)
- Donaldson's School for the Deaf (Edinburgh)
- Westerlea School (Edinburgh)
- Astley Ainslie Hospital Class (Edinburgh)
- St Vincent School for the Deaf (Edinburgh)
- Princess Margaret Rose Hospital Class (Edinburgh)
- Trefoil Residential School -

(in Whitburn from 1945-1951 then to Edinburgh).

Timeline of access to education for disabled children



The Warnock Report published. This report was to change the educational picture for children with disabilities and most of what was recommended became enshrined in law.

Education Act 1980 saw children with special educational needs have their rights turned into law for the first time.

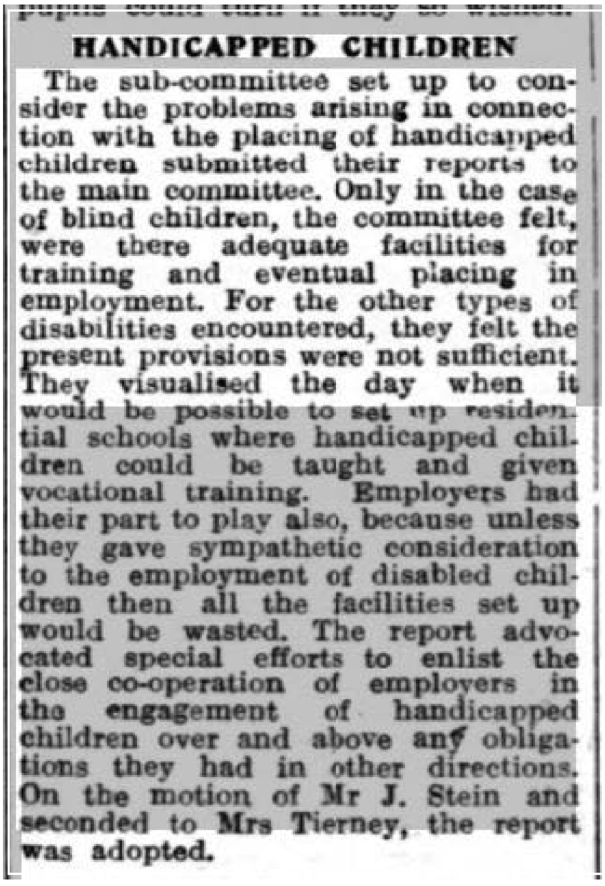
Excellence for all children, meeting educational needs was a government paper published which detailed an approach to improving the achievement of children with special education needs in the UK.

Beatlie School opened its new purpose-built site in Livingston for children with special education needs.

Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (SENDA) came into effect which removed some of the caveats for access to mainstream education and made educational discrimination unlawful.

"I went to Westerlea first, that was for people with Cerebral Palsy in Edinburgh. I got there by taxi or minibus…I had friends at school and I also had friends in my estate. I was lucky as I stayed at home with my parents, but it was a residential school."

-Moira, 53, Livingston. Born with Cerebral Palsy and attended Westerlea School.



HANDICAPPED CHILDREN

The sub-committee set up to consider the problems arising in connection with the placing of handicapped children submitted their reports to the main committee. Only in the case of blind children, the committee felt, were there adequate facilities for training and eventual placing in employment. For the other types of disabilities encountered, they felt the present provisions were not sufficient. They visualised the day when it would be possible to set up residential schools where handicapped children could be taught and given vocational training. Employers had their part to play also, because unless they gave sympathetic consideration to the employment of disabled children then all the facilities set up would be wasted. The report advocated special efforts to enlist the close co-operation of employers in the engagement of handicapped children over and above any obligations they had in other directions. On the motion of Mr J. Stein and seconded to Mrs Tierney, the report was adopted.

Article in the West Lothian Courier from a parent's meeting in Bathgate 1952 regarding vocational training for children with a disability.
Image courtesy of British Newspaper Archive

"I went to a mainstream nursery and then my surgeon decided at 4 years that I needed to go to a specialist school. I went to Westerlea, so he could watch my progress and tell me when I needed operations done. So I was in and out of Princess Margaret Rose Hospital to get operations done when I was at school, but I also had education in school, so I didn't miss out. Sometimes if it was a short procedure, I got it done during term time, but if it was long, they waited until the summer holidays. Quite a lot of my peers had similar operations at the same hospital."

Moira, 53, sharing some of her education history

Children doing brick building in their hospital beds
© Newsquest (Herald & Times).

Hospital Patient [child] doing schoolwork
© Newsquest (Herald & Times).

Billy Wilson, 65, shares his experiences accessing education:

"To be quite frank with you, my education was non existent until I went to school, but they didn't teach me…there was no law until the 1970's that made it lawful to educate the disabled. In primary one/two I was stuck up the back of the class with a tin of plasticine and told to get on with it…They were learning their ABCs and I was learning nothing. I actually started school in Princess Margaret Rose hospital and when I got out…I was sent to primary school…there was just nothing, you know, it wasn't until I got into the next classroom which was under a new headmaster…his wife took an interest in trying to teach me but I was so far behind by that point. My education was lacking in every level, from maths, English, everything. By the time I got to the final year, in those days you had to sit an exam – the eleven plus, everybody sat it, it actually designated where you'd go in secondary year – I didn't even get that! I was given an entrance exam to a boarding school in Edinburgh for the disabled called Trefoil."

Trefoil School, Polkemmet © West Lothian Council Libraries.

***"All the local secondary schools didn't want to know, the minute they heard my level of disability they didn't want to know.
Eventually a local Labour MP intervened who supported him to get a place at Bathgate academy. He did not receive mainstream schooling there for a further two years despite the respondent not having a learning disability. He left school at 16 with no qualifications."***
Billy, 65, on his secondary education.

Billy is asked how that felt:

***"Pretty bad, but I used to go down to the rector's office every day and demand to be put into a normal class, eventually, after two years I was but by then I was coming up sixteen and I had nothing, no chance of sitting O levels, or A levels or anything like that. So that summer I left school"
"I did get an education but it was an education I got for me, through F.E colleges, open university and other places."***

By the 1970s the philosophy of segregating children with a disability from mainstream education became increasingly questioned and by 1973, the Warnock Committee was established, whose job was to review the provision of education in England, Wales and Scotland for children with a disability.
It published a report in 1978 and proposed the use of the term 'special educational needs' for pupils with a disability and contained more than 220 recommendations about appropriate educational provision.

This was seen as a positive step forward and much of this was reflected in the 1980 Education (Scotland) Act whereby children with special educational needs had their rights enshrined in law for the first time.

Integration was encouraged and promoted children with special education needs learning alongside their mainstream peers with many children with a disability attending their local primary and secondary schools. This had mixed success.

There was also more access to more modern and better equipped ‘special needs schools’ including:

- Graysmill School (Edinburgh)
- Williowpark School (Edinburgh)
- Beatlie School (West Lothian)
- Pinewood School (West Lothian)
- Oakbank School (West Lothian)

“The school was all accessible. It was a school for people like myself, but most were more disabled than myself. I would say I was one of the more able kids at schools. I liked free-time and sports. I got introduced to wheelchair dancing. Probably why I like wheelchair dancing was that you got off class to practise. It was like a team of 6 or maybe 8 of us. We went into competitions. So we became Scottish champions for our age range.”
Gordon, 53, attended Graysmill special school.

Stanley Baxter presents Snoopy phone to children of Graysmill school 1985.
© The Scotsman Publications Ltd.

Moira Mungall, who was born with Cerebal Palsy, shares her experience of attending Graysmill school from 1981.

“The secondary school, Graysmill, was even more accessible. It was built with disabled people in mind. It was opened in 1973 for spina bifida children, because they had a boom in that year for spina bifida children. But because there was not enough, it was opened up to any disability.
There was an increase in the number of people with spina bifida in the sixties and seventies. The main disabilities are cerebral palsy and spina bifida. In the early years, it used to be polio. The other people at school had disabilities, so we just got on with it. I was brought up to be ‘you might have a walking disability, but I got treated like everyone else’. At school we did wheelchair dancing and we did like ‘knock out’ javelin, club wheelchair sports.

We also went to London to Hammersmith Palais, dancing in front of the Queen.
I was told to go to Graysmill school, because I had to get operations. Linlithgow Academy had stairs, so it was not suitable. The primary school Westerlea was very strict, but Graysmill was like a normal High School. You got more freedom... to go to local shop at lunchtime. Westerlea was at Ellersly Road, Murrayfield, Edinburgh and Graysmill was at Craiglockhart. These schools and the hospital are now flats and houses. The teachers at school were nice and really helpful. At Graysmill I studied nearly all the subjects, Science and English were my favourites. I hated Maths.


Moira

After leaving school I went to Stevenson College, Edinburgh to do a bridging course. It was not my choice. Careers told me if I didn’t go there, I would end up in New Trinity which was a work placement. I did reasonably well at school. If I had the choice, I would have liked to have worked in a nursery with children. I wanted to be a nurse or air hostess when I was young. But I never got the chance.”

By the early 1990s, serious reservations were being expressed about the reality of integration of pupils with a disability into mainstream education.
Inclusion required schools and teachers, not only to increase the participation of children with additional support needs in schools but also to remove the exclusionary barriers from access to the building to attitudes in the classrooms and this did not always happen.

***"I went to a small rural school and...I was diagnosed as dyslexic, but back in the eighties I was told it was a reading and writing problem...
There was about twenty of us over P1 to P7. I got held back a year to catch up with all the other kids. I didn't realise, because being in such a small school, that it was a problem until I went to High School and got put in Remedial and I got singled out and bullied on a regular basis for my dyslexia. Because I was told I was stupid and retarded and I was a waste of space and all the other nice things that go with being dyslexic, but I didn't know that at the time."***
Susan T, sharing her experience in school with hidden disability.

In 1995, the Disability Discrimination Act was established which provided comprehensible and enforceable civil rights for children with a disability, the act, however, did not consider education providers, so in 2001 the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act was created to tackle discrimination in schools and to ensure that all pupils were offered the same opportunities and choices.
West Lothian, around this time, saw the formation of the organisations such as Signpost, which began as a volunteer project in September 2000, run by a group of parents of children with additional support needs. Telephone callers were offered information about local services including education and had a chance to chat with parents who had been through similar experiences. 2004 saw the Scottish Parliament pass the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act which transformed special educational needs provision in Scotland and replaced the term 'special educational needs' by the much broader concept of 'additional support needs'.

"It was difficult, especially at school, cause at the mainstream school I had, it wasn't adapted, it was just an ordinary mainstream school and sometimes I wasn't allowed out to play in case I got knocked over as a child cause there was a lot of people at the school so sometimes I would have to have someone with me during break-time and help going to the toilet and at lunchtime as well."

"As a child I didn't really fully understand what I was going through…things were different back then…back in the eighties…they didn't have the same sort of understanding of disabled people or have the same rights, I suppose, for disabled people…it was difficult you know."
Scott, 46, on attending mainstream school in the 1980's with a physical disability.

1993 saw Lothian Regional Council make more money available for bringing children with a disability into mainstream schools, however for many pupils who attended mainstream school segregation still took place to various degrees.

“My Mum and Dad tried to get me into mainstream school but at the time there wasn’t a place...when one did come available…I was getting ready to leave school anyway so there was no point.”
-James, 34, Polbeth. Attended Graysmill Special School Edinburgh

"For me, the periods when I wasn't in school were the happiest times."

Colin Williamson, 53, shares with us his experiences attending a mainstream school with hidden disabilities, and disabilities that weren't recognised. It wasn't until adulthood that he received a diagnosis of autism.

"When I went to school my problems were compounded by the fact I couldn't read and I couldn't write, and I had all sorts of problems, and of course, in those days they didn't recognise dyslexia or dysgraphia or even autism… because of my difficulties with reading and writing, difficulties with numbers, I was thrown into what was called 'the remedial stream' in those days, they didn't recognise dyslexia or dysgraphia...I was just dubbed as lazy."

Colin at school
Image courtesy of
Colin Williamson

"So school wasn't that great but there were moments in school...there was a teacher, I was in primary 3, and she was a brilliant storyteller, and she loved history, in particular Scottish history and she gave me a love of history....she told us stories about the Wallace and the Bruce....she was able to bring the history to life, she was a brilliant storyteller. So I've got her to thank cause I've got a really vivid imagination and I'm now a storyteller myself so I've kind of got this Mrs Murray in primary 3 to thank for giving me my love of history."

Since the 1960s there has been a practice in the UK secondary school system to 'stream' students in the core subjects of English and Maths according to their ability, and for students who were struggling with these subjects to learn in segregated classes which at that time were known as 'remedial' classes. On numerous occasions children were deemed as 'slow learners' rather than needing additional support due to them having dyslexia or dysgraphia.

Colin, Image courtesy
of Colin Williamson

"I think it's easy when you look back to kind of, your school days, and I'm sure there any many people who have struggled with a whole range of disabilities. My age group would concur that life wasn't easy...growing up in a system where there wasn't recognition or attempts to accommodate these differences."

"We've got...I've got a responsibility to those around me, I feel to make, to use my story and my experiences with my hidden differences to make life better for others. That's what I feel I need to do."

Colin is now a historian, storyteller, narrator and celebrant. He has also written a book called "Success on the Spectrum" sharing his personal story.

In recent years, the inclusion of children with additional support needs in mainstream schools has become the focus of an increasingly polarised public debate with supporters of mainstreaming believing the policy promotes the ideals of social inclusion whereas, supporters of special schools feel that such provision results in better support and education for pupils with additional support needs.

"I think it's gone backwards…only in exceptional circumstances would a child go into a special school but, it seems to be becoming more and more the norm that children are going into a special school, or they are in mainstream school but in units within a mainstream school where they're still kept separate."
Aileen, Torphicen. Whose daughter Cat, attended both a mainstream and special needs schools in West Lothian in the early 2000s.

"We were very much wanting her to go into a mainstream school because we felt that would probably bring her on more, and we did a lot of research prior to even putting in an application, we went round quite a few mainstream schools to see what their accessibility was like.
We settled on Windyknowe primary in Bathgate because it had actually just had a big extension done and was a bit more spacious and accessible for her. We put in a placement request, and it got turned down and they told us that she was going to Pinewood."

Aileen shares with us that this made her very angry as they did not want Cat to attend a special school. With support from a fellow parent who was going through the same process, she appealed the decision and won.

Cat learning about different occupations at Pinewood school, Blackburn, West Lothian
Image courtesy of Aileen Liddell


Cat going to Prom
Image courtesy of Aileen Liddell

"So that went ahead and she was in Windyknowe for the whole of primary 1 and most of primary 2...she had a support assistant assigned to her full-time but what was then happening was the support assistant was seconded into the nursery. They didn't have anyone to support Cat so they asked if they could put her into Pinewood on a temporary basis, and that temporary basis...it became full time but with one afternoon at primary for social inclusion. By the time she reached secondary age there was no social inclusion provided at all but I must say that her time at Pinewood was happy. She didn't achieve a lot, but she learnt a lot of skills and she did have a good friend network as a result, and she still actually keeps in touch with a lot of those friends to this day."

Aileen is asked about Cat's impact on the mainstream school she attended:
"[laughs] she got them a disabled toilet, a changing area! But I think it gave the staff, who came across Cat, a better understanding of disability but also from the children who were in the class, much as cat wasn't verbal as such within the class what we have discovered is that there are still, to this day, young adults, the same age as Cat who will come up and say "oh I remember you from class, how are you doing?" that is a completely different feeling."

Aileen is asked how that feels:
"It's amazing, especially when she goes into a pub and the girl that's serving behind the bar "oh I remember you! [laughs] how are you doing?" she chats away to them [laughs]...[Cat] does have a great friend base from the children that she was with. I think with a bit further support she probably would have come on better in mainstream school."


Cat at Blackness, Image courtesy of Aileen Liddell

Aileen is asked about her hopes for the future:
"That Cat continues with what she has at the moment and still has an enjoyable life, my worry is what happens when John and I aren't around...what's gonna happen? Is it gonna be back to Gogarburn? Is it gonna, you know, be another kind of residential setting? It's a scary scary thought."

"Once I'd left school, that was it…things were drying up for me and I wasn't getting the same opportunities that I wanted."
Scott, 46, Born with Spina Bifida, talks about life after school.

It was during the Second World War that the government recognised that there would be an increase in its population of people with a disability, as injured soldiers returned to everyday society. In 1943, the Government set up the Tomlinson Committee who advocated statutory legislation for rehabilitation, sheltered workshops and the introduction of a 'quota' of employees with a disability.

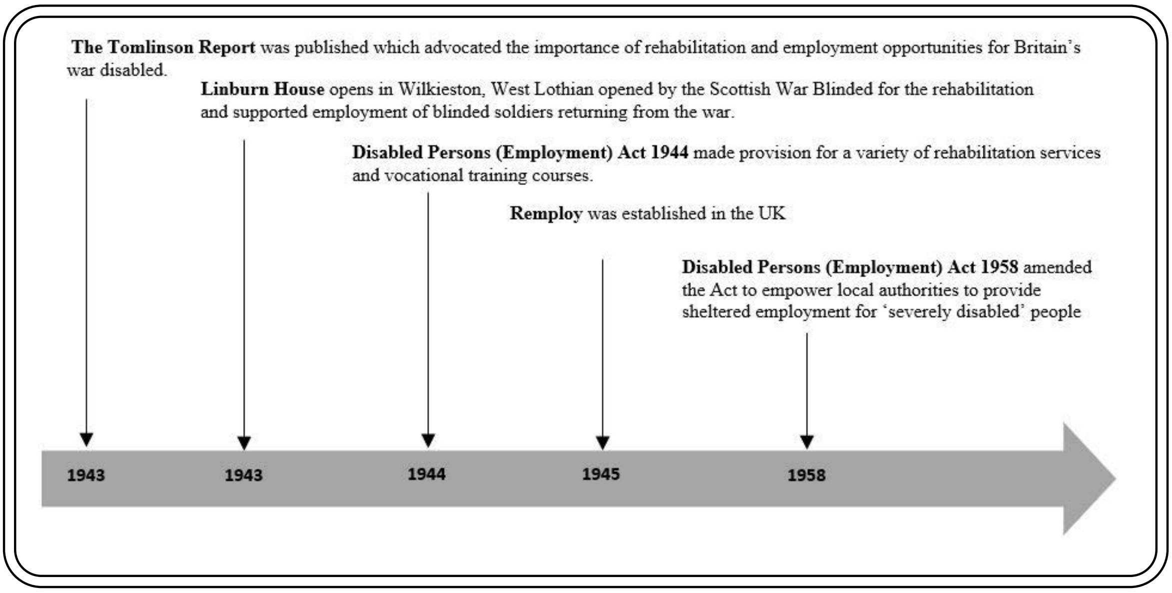
Shortly afterwards, the Disabled Persons (Employment) Act 1944 came into force and it made provision for the setting up of a disabled persons employment register, the creation of assessment, rehabilitation and training facilities as well as a specialised employment placement service. The Act also put a duty on businesses of 20 or more workers to employ a three per cent quota of registered people with a disability, as well as protect against unfair dismissal of anyone on the register. Both state and charity run organisations emerged to undertake these roles and in West Lothian Linburn House was one such facility opened by the Scottish War Blinded Association in Wilkieston around this time. The facility offered rehabilitation, employment and specialised training for outside occupations for its members. The Act was welcomed by many and hundreds of thousands of people joined the register to receive state vocational training, which ran at 67 centres throughout the country. A Disability Resettlement Officer was also on hand to help place them in a job once trained.


Linburn Staff and members.
© Sight Scotland Veterans

The focus was on finding work and for many people on the register, this meant supported employment in schemes such as Remploy. Remploy was established for those who needed supported employment and although limited by shortages of suitable buildings and government funds, by 1953, it had 90 factories employing 6,000 people with a disability


Remploy Factory in Granton.
© The Scotsman Publications Ltd.

Timeline of accessibility to Employment


The Tomlinson Report was published which advocated the importance of rehabilitation and employment opportunities for Britain's war disabled.

Linburn House opens in Wilkieston, West Lothian opened by the Scottish War Blinded for the rehabilitation and supported employment of blinded soldiers returning from the war.

Disabled Persons (Employment) Act 1944 made provision for a variety of rehabilitation services and vocational training courses.

Remploy was established in the UK

Disabled Persons (Employment) Act 1958 amended the Act to empower local authorities to provide sheltered employment for 'severely disabled' people


★ AMAZING, really, what can be done by the blind and other disabled people. Bathgate Town Council this week heard a letter from the Disablement Income Group. inviting their support in patronising the products made by the blind at their Shelter Workshops. Mattresses, pillows, brushes, etc., there seems no limit to the goods the blind can produce — and all at very competitive prices.

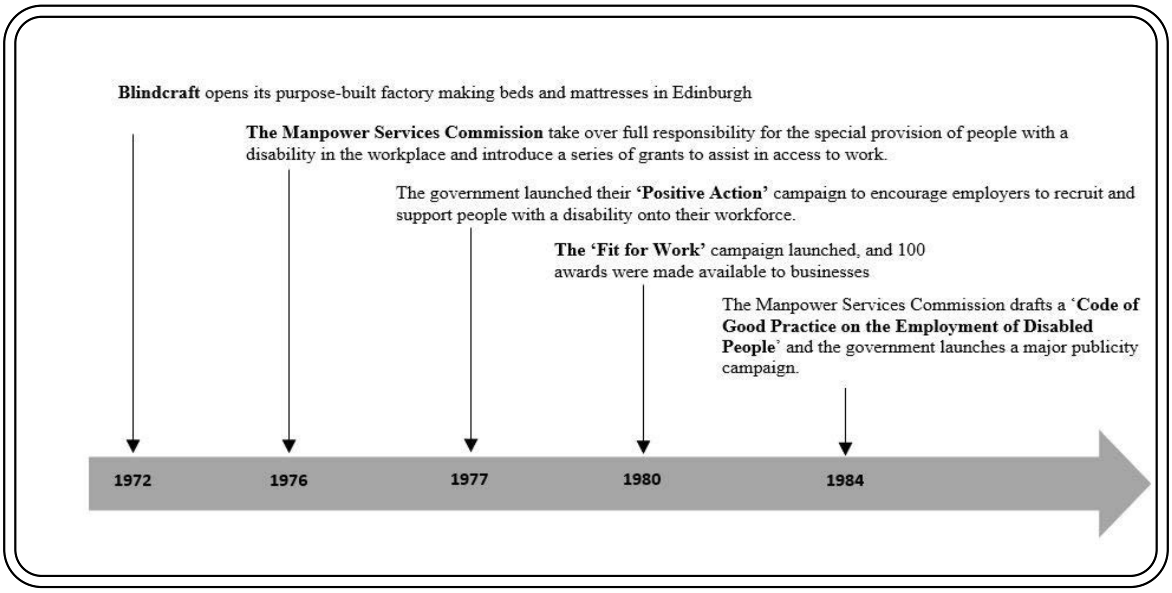
The '60s saw the rise of many disability campaign groups in the UK fighting for civil rights and in 1965 the Disablement Income Group was one such group. It highlighted that people born with a disability did not receive the same benefits and employment support as those injured in war or in the workplace, who were entitled to significantly more.

Article in the West Lothian Courier on Bathgate Disablement Income Group 1972
Image courtesy of The British Newspaper Archives

Over the decades many similar schemes and training centres were established with varying degrees of success, and in 1958 the Disabled Persons Employment Act was amended to include that local authorities were to find provision for 'severely disabled' people through sheltered employment centres.
For many medium and large businesses to meet their 3% quota of staff on their workforce with a disability, low skilled work such as lift operators or car park attendants positions were reserved for this purpose, however, many people found such employment to be 'tokenistic and patronising'.

"One job was on a building site…It would have been better if they had picked a more suitable job. Putting a disabled person on a building site is no that great. I was handing out the tools at the start and putting them back. The rest of the time I just sat in the hut listening to the radio."
Gordon, 53, on employment in his 20s

Timeline of accessibility to Employment



Blindcraft opens its purpose-built factory making beds and mattresses in Edinburgh

The Manpower Services Commission take over full responsibility for the special provision of people with a disability in the workplace and introduce a series of grants to assist in access to work.

The government launched their **'Positive Action'** campaign to encourage employers to recruit and support people with a disability onto their workforce.

The 'Fit for Work' campaign launched, and 100 awards were made available to businesses

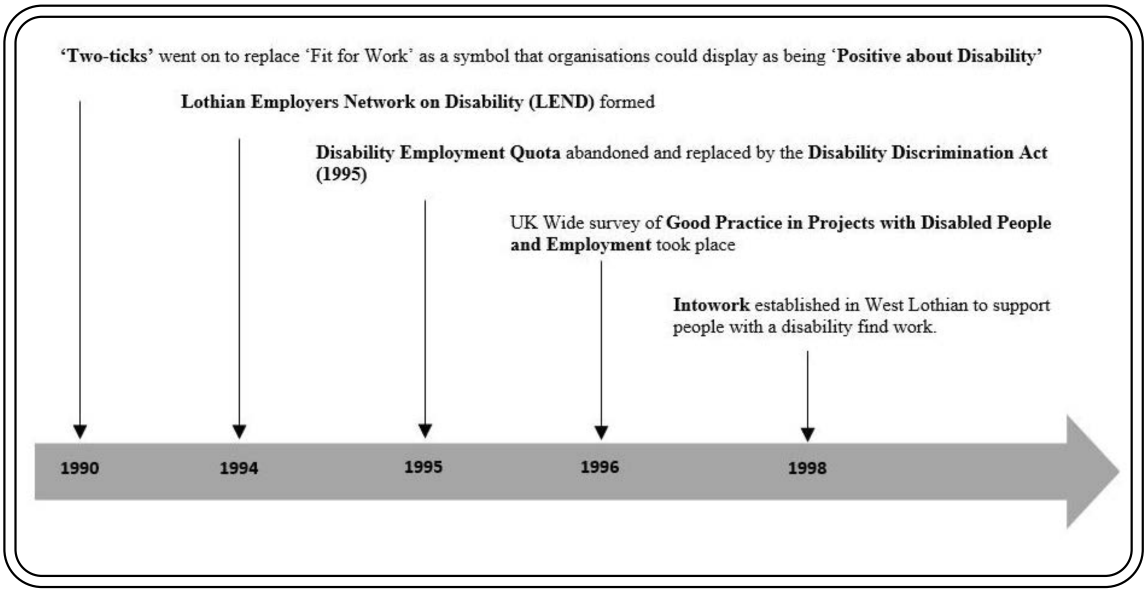
The Manpower Services Commission drafts a '**Code of Good Practice on the Employment of Disabled People**' and the government launches a major publicity campaign.

For many people who lived in institutions or long stay hospitals such as Bangour and Gogarburn in West Lothian then industrial therapy units (ITUs) became popular in the 1970s as a means to offer sheltered employment to residents. The units were often located within or just off hospital grounds and residents were given release privileges to attend. Contracts (usually simple assembly tasks) were commissioned by external organisations and workers were paid a small 'therapeutic wage' in return for their labour.

"It was for a whisky place, putting bottles of whisky in, and you put like four squares and you put the squares thegither like that and ye put them into the box and that was the box made and then the next one and the next one… There'd be about 150 people worked in the one unit doing it."

James B, 71, talking about working The Industrial Therapy Unit at Gogarburn Hospital

The 'Basket Shop' part of the industrial units at Gogarburn Hospital circa 1950s.
Image courtesy of 'Gogarburn Lives'



'Two-ticks' went on to replace 'Fit for Work' as a symbol that organisations could display as being '**Positive about Disability**'

Lothian Employers Network on Disability (LEND) formed

Disability Employment Quota abandoned and replaced by the **Disability Discrimination Act (1995)**

UK Wide survey of **Good Practice in Projects with Disabled People and Employment** took place

Intowork established in West Lothian to support people with a disability find work.

In 1976 the Manpower Services Commission (MSC), created by the Conservative Government, took over full responsibility for the special provision of people with a disability in the workplace. Over the next couple of years, they launched several new measures including: payments to employers to enable them to adapt their premises to recruit or retain an employee known as the Special Aids to Employment Scheme, and fares to work for those who could not use public transport and a Job Introduction Scheme which paid a subsidy for six weeks to an employer taking on a person with a disability. 1980 saw a 'Positive Action' campaign launched to help larger employers increase their 'disabled workforce' and 55,000 firms were targeted with booklets outlining six main guidelines on recruitment, retention, training, career development, and modification and adaptation of equipment and premises. This scheme did not prove successful and two years later a 'Fit for Work' campaign was launched to assist the limited impact of Positive Action by offering 100 awards each year to firms that made 'outstanding achievements in the employment of disabled people', measured by adherence to the same six guidelines.

Famous RAF pilot Sir Douglas Bader, himself an amputee, launches the 'Fit for Work' Scheme in 1980.
Photo courtesy of East Anglican Film Archive

In 1984, the MSC drafted a Code of Good Practice on the Employment of Disabled People and the Government launched a major publicity campaign in support, however, again it would not have much impact in influencing employers' attitudes towards people with a disability and employment, with regard both to employers' compliance with the quota scheme and to the promotion of better employment practices generally.

“I was probably the most experienced welder in the place and they refused to give me parity with the other welders, who weren’t as experienced. They were earning a damn site more than I was...so I left.”

Billy W, 65, shares his experience working at Blindcraft

Fit for Work Logo 1980
Image courtesy of BFI

The scheme lasted for 11 years but was reported to have had little impact as many employees with disabilities were not being well supported within their workplaces.
Although more people with a disability were working in mainstream employment - assessment for work, at this time, had been provided almost exclusively through regional Employment Rehabilitation Centres (ERCs) which trained people in low skilled manual work and Adult Training Centres (ATCs) which were government run employment training services that catered for people with learning disabilities. By the mid 80s there were over 480 of these centres all over the UK and the majority of young people with learning disabilities being placed in ATCs by professionals as soon as they left school.

“After I left college, I did voluntary work. I started off doing a YTS course and then I went as a volunteer to Disability West Lothian. I have been there nearly 30 years. I do access work. We go out to buildings and churches and help them on access issues. I enjoy that. We’ve covered most of the council buildings and when the Partnership was opened, we were brought in for advice.” Moira M, 53 on employment opportunities after leaving college.

1982 computer course.
Image courtesy of the BBC.

“Coming to Telford college was one of the best decisions I’ve ever made in my life, and all the staff have made me feel so welcome. I went on and did a course there for about 10yrs. I joined ECDL, helping people with ECDL or computer maintenance and 4th sector sent me away to Glasgow to do a Microsoft course...

I felt better about myself, and everybody inside the college was very proud of me.” -Sammie V, on completing his European Computer Driving License course and then assisting on the courses.

The following decade saw the Government move away from ‘specialist’ disability employment services and move for job centres to work with all. It was also around this time that the Government also put increasing stress on including job seekers with a disability in mainstream training programmes such as the Youth Training Scheme (YTS), Employment Training (ET) and Job Clubs.

“You were allowed to send 10 letters a week…to get employment. I was sending sometimes 100, 200, 300, whatever. Stencilled letters, CVs, printed on the premises, and posted out. I got one interview, and got the job, and that was with the Civil Service, and it was for a 6 month contract with Bathgate…working in their mobility and attendance allowance departments” Billy W, 65, discussing Job club

YTS was a common experience amongst the people we spoke to:

“I did a YTS course in 1991/92....I did office work but it was very basic. I wanted to do driving work, I was interested in driving because I had a car, still have a car, and that’s what I felt I was good at and I knew that, you know, walking with sticks…I was going to be limited to what I could do but I was looking for work, doing sort of light work, you know, maybe a courier, that sort of work…and the employment advisor, at the disability, at the job centre, he would always sort of, try and look for work for me to do but he never came back with anything, he was just useless basically, never got anywhere with him.” Scott W, talking about looking for work after leaving school.

‘Two-ticks’ went on to replace ‘Fit for Work’ in 1990 as a symbol that organisations could display as a commitment to good employment opportunities for people with a disability.

The 1990s saw the Conservative Government push to encourage more people into work by promoting ‘work incentives’ among people with a disability which saw a restriction on unemployment benefits. Invalidity Benefit being replaced with the less generous Incapacity Benefit which was determined by strict medical testing and the introduction of the Disability Working Allowance, which was designed to ‘top up’ the incomes of people with a disability in low paid work.

The Government recognised that people with a disability continued to encounter discrimination when seeking work and made a move to increase education and awareness for employers. As a result, Local Employer Networks developed, such as the Lothian Employers Network on Disability (LEND) formed in 1994, which aimed to tackle issues of employment and disability from the employer’s perspective as well as share experiences and learn from each other to promote good practices within the region.

The Employability Forum also emerged around this time whose main achievements included the production and distribution of Employing People with Disabilities in Edinburgh and Lothian - An Action Guide and assisting in the development and presentation of the programme of events entitled Disability Works ‘96.

Supported employment services continued to play a big part for many people with a disability and in 1995 the Scottish Union of Supported Employment (SUSE) was established to improve supported employment services in Scotland.

At this time, West Lothian saw a number of these supported employment services develop in the county including Polbeth Market Garden Project which was a horticultural work training project for young adults with a disability and Worklink which offered courses and job placements to people with a disability, seeking employment with both projects funded by West Lothian Voluntary Council for Disabled People (now Disability West Lothian) and the local Council.

Market garden Euro backing

■ TRAINEES and staff at the Polbeth Market Garden are celebrating the news that their project has been recommended for European Social Funding (ESF) this year.

■ The project is currently co-funded by Lothian Regional Council and sponsored by the West Lothian Voluntary Council for Disabled People Ltd.

■ Explained Pauline Bifphan of the European Unit: "Around 4000 of the most disadvantaged unemployed people obtained places on voluntary sector ESF training projects in Scotland in 1994. Seventy per cent of those progressed into work or further education.

■ "In order to bring in around £6 million of European money to Scotland in 1995 to help these most vulnerable groups, we need the support of the new unitary authorities to match this funding."

■ Regional Councillor Tony Kinder joined trainees and members of the management group to find out just how hard they work at the Polbeth Market Garden project and to back their bid for European Social Funding.

Polbeth Market Garden Project, West Lothian
Article and image courtesy West Lothian Courier

1995 saw the introduction of landmark legislation and the Disability Discrimination Act come into force the following year which made it unlawful to discriminate against a person in respect of their disability concerning employment.

A new National Disability Council was formed to advise the government and many local authorities reviewed their existing service provision.

“After leaving school I went to Stevenson College, Edinburgh to do a bridging course. It was not my choice. Careers told me if I didn’t go there, I would end up in New Trinity which was a work placement. I did reasonably well at school. If I had the choice, I would have liked to have worked in a nursery with children. I wanted to be a nurse or air hostess when I was young. But I never got the chance.”
Moira, 53, on attending college.

In 1996 a UK Wide survey of Good Practice in Projects with Disabled People and Employment took place and one of its major findings was that there was still a very low awareness, outwith disability organisations, of the barriers, attitudes and exclusion faced by many people with a disability in the workplace.

By the start of the next decade, the percentage of employment for people with a disability had risen from 17% in 1987 to 28% in 2000, and remained around this level for the next ten years. The experiences of many of the people who took part in this project reflect the successes and failures of the Government's various disability policies throughout the years.

"There was a job opportunity coming up for me working in the mail room and that came up for me, saw the building and thought yeah, this will be alright for me…so it was agreed that I would have this role working in the mail room on my own…so I was willing to give it a go. It was okay to start off with but I felt that although people were coming in and out, I was on my own…and I was really getting, I was actually getting quite frustrated staring at four walls. I was always raising things with my supervisors, like how I could progress, but nothing really happened, I stuck with it anyway, it was money coming in, and I wanted to be out in the community, feel like I was doing something…".
Scott W, 46

In West Lothian, children with a disability were often sent to institutions such as Baldovan Institute (which became Starthmartin Hospital) in Dundee, Larbert Institute in Falkirk or St Joseph's Hospital in Edinburgh. Placements would not be limited to hospitals in the local area, and it was an acceptable practice for people to be sent many miles away. The nearest institution in West Lothian for people with learning disabilities was Gogarburn, but you could be sent to any institution across Scotland.

"I started off at normal school and I went until five, but I only got 6 months at normal school, about 5 and a half, my mum wasn't keeping too good and my stepfather would up and go… so she couldn't look after me. So I ended up going from there into Bandrum, that's a care home and I was in there for nearly 5 year but there was no schooling."

James B, 72, who was sent to residential care in Dumfermline.

The early part of the twentieth century saw the passing of the 1913 Mental Deficiency Act which specified that many adults and children, with either a learning disability or mental health problem, should be sent to live in long stay hospitals or institutions, which separated them from society and meant they could be strictly controlled. Such institutions sprang up all over the country and in West Lothian Bangour Village Hospital in the Dechmont area of the county or to Gogarburn in Edinburgh were such places.

James Burt spent thirty years of his life in various institutions across Scotland, from Carstairs to Gogarburn. Here he shares some of his experiences of life in an institution.

"I was in long stay hospital for quite a few years, some days it was good, some days it was bad, depends on the staff. Some staff didnae like the way you dressed or what shirt ye had on or what troosers ye had on, or what socks ye had on, they were never happy."

"Sometimes while I was in hospital I did not have an easy night. What I mean by not having an easy night is, I did not go into an easy sleep. I'd go into a wet sleep, and I'd wake up with the bed swimming, even the flair was all wet, I was not even aware of, aware of doing it...some staff would gie me clean sheets and put clean sheets on the bed, other staff would say your just gonna lie in it James. That's what they done in Bandrum. They wouldn't change the bed you'd end go'n and lie in it. It was the same as when you're in Bandrum, you went for a bath once a week, you were in the bath before me, I had the same bath as you, and someone else the same bath as me...4 or 5 people, the water wasn't very clean when it came out the tank, what ye call it, was very rusty, you seen the rust in the water."

James is asked if there anything positive about Gogarburn?
"Not really, it was like an old institution."

James is asked if he had a say it what he ate?
"Nope, some days you would get your choice what you wanted on the plate, no bother, other days you got it like pig slop. Do ye ken what pig slop means? [Laughs] you've heard the word, everything gets put in the big pot and mixed, then comes oot wi a ladle...it was just like feeding the pigs, when they dee that I say "I dinnae want none, I'd rather go without."

James is asked if he had a choice in what he wore?
"Nope, they issued you wi clothes, your clothes wi yer name on them but somedays you couldna get the shirt on cause once it came back from the wash place, or what ye call it the dry cleaning place, it was too much starch in it or the way they dried it or the way it was ironed ye felt like "oooh ya….." uncomfortable, same as the troosers, same as the socks, everything was uncomfortable."

Most institutions were small, self-contained worlds where often 900 and 1,500 people would live in detached villas with each housing up to 60 people, grouped around a central administrative block, which formed a barrier between male and female villas.

Many had their own farms with market gardens, stables, poultry, pigs, herds of cows and greenhouses. As well as nurses they employed farm bailiffs, firemen, engineers and, of course, gatekeepers. Most patients worked (unpaid) in the laundries and workshops or on the farm. The children attended school, where they would learn useful occupational skills for their future life as an adult in the institution.


Patients washing a car at Bangour Village Hospital
Image courtesy of West Lothian Health Archives

Throughout the 1980s there was a growing campaign by people with disability and related organisations to persuade governments to introduce anti-discrimination legislation to enable disabled people to participate fully in the economic and social life of the community, which included the closure of institutions such as Gogarburn and Bangour Village Hospitals.

"The general hospital was built behind that. Gogarburn, which at that time, fell into West Lothian, seemed to have a large number of children sent there, and many of them spent a long time there. It was their homes, sometimes for the rest of their lives." Frances, 80, talking about local institutions

Late 90s early 2000s, attitudes began to change and long stay hospitals began to be abolished. Individuals were moved into care in the community. Care companies were set up for home care, person centred planning took dominance over control and choice was a large part of day to day living for individuals.

"Left Gogarburn '83, they were starting to close certain wards, and they wanted certain patients out.
So they started to ask you "what would you like?"
I wanted a flat on my own."
"Oh I don't think you'll manage in a flat on your own James, we have a hostel for you, one of two hostels"
No thanks, I said, it's still a hospital and I just said I'm no wanting that, and I disagreed with them for quite a wee while, I disagreed wi' them for nearly four years. Oh it worked, ah said am no taking it, and a said am no puckin takin it, an ah said am no takin it. And that's what it was a' about. Until one day there was a charge who came into the ward and a doctor came in and this social worker came, and they said
"Well James, we're getting fed up wi you and your cheeky ideas, and your smart ideas."
Ah said am just telling you what I dinnae want. I'm just being straight forward, am no wanting your rubbish place. So in the end they said
"I'm gonna take you oot the morn and we'll go roon the council to see if we can get ye a flat."
Fine, and we went to Livingston Council, pit my name down there, went to Broxburn Council, a went to Edinburgh Council and the nearest council, I got offered a flat in 6 weeks, wiz Livingston but there was a snag. When they offered me the flat in Livingston it was a four apartment, three bedrooms, and the hospital wisnae too happy, ah said what's wrong wi that? They said James it's too big for ye. Ah said so what am no wanting nae one else sharing wi me, am no bothered twa empty rooms, they can lie empty. In the end they said aye okay we'll gie ye a chance, and that's what happened. I moved in and I was quite happy since then, but I still had to come back into the hospital through the day to work."
James B. Former patient of Gogarburn

Long stay learning disability hospitals had been a central part of learning disability services and had an enormous impact on the lives of people with learning disabilities. Whether their experiences had been good or bad, many people who had lived in institutions found the move to living in local communities a difficult one.

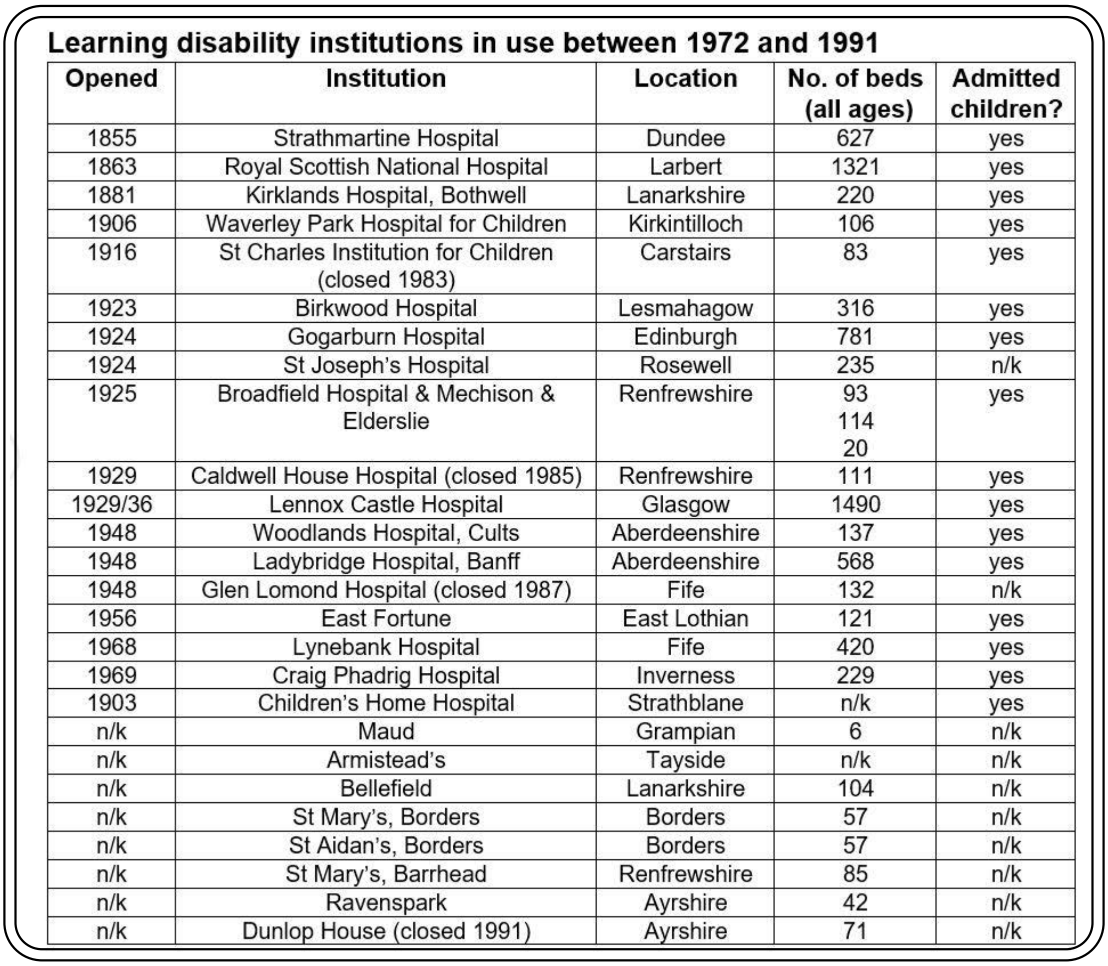
"My years in Gogarburn were valuable as well because that was closing, we were moving people out of there. And then now, in West Lothian Council, I still feel a valued person. I think there's more leadership with closing the hospital and getting people integrated into the wider community, because early on there was probably some restrictions there regarding people worrying about how they were going to get out of the hospital. There's a lot of leadership shown by SAMH during that period of time to make people feel more at ease with the hospital closure because people had been in the wards for many many years and therefore people weren't sure about people coming out the hospital but it proved that these fears were unwarranted. So I think there was a lot of leadership by SAMH in the early days. Don't know about now right enough but certainly Bathgate House has shown a lot of leadership, in the community, and integration in the community. I think John McLean has been in the forefront of that, so he's been a great model for the community. John's the day services manager so he's been a good role model for people."
James H, worked within mental health since 1985

"I got a wee bit bothering but I just stuck it out. When I got the flat I was picking wee things up, well buying things for the house, and every so often the house would get broken into and that person would take the lot...I ended up stopping buying things for the house. When I moved in the house, first thing I bought was a new bed, the second day I went back to the house it was away." James B, sharing his experience with his first tenancy after moving out of Gogarburn

Concern for the reality of life after institutions was shared by many disability support organisations.

"We have worries about the way that people are supported to leave hospital and the kind of lives they are living outside. We feel that in many cases people with learning difficulties are still separated from the rest of the community and are still not having enough choices in their lives."
Between the Devil and the Deep Blue C, People First (Scotland), 2000

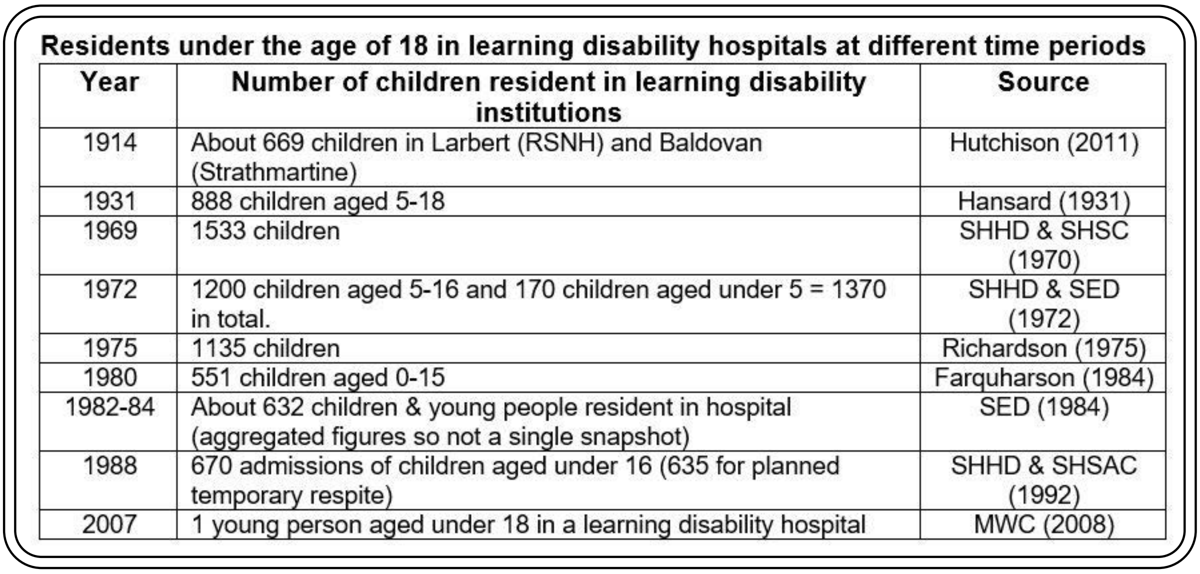
In 2014, the Scottish Consortium Learning Difficulties (SCLD) conducted a research project to determine the number of people who were sent to institutions as children from 1930-2005. The report showed that the use of institutional care for adults and children was significant throughout the 20th century and identified 35 long stay hospitals in Scotland that admitted children. On average children made up around 20% of the population in learning disability hospitals.



Learning disability institutions in use between 1972 and 1991

Opened	Institution	Location	No. of beds (all ages)	Admitted children?
1855	Strathmartine Hospital	Dundee	627	yes
1863	Royal Scottish National Hospital	Larbert	1321	yes
1881	Kirklands Hospital, Bothwell	Lanarkshire	220	yes
1906	Waverley Park Hospital for Children	Kirkintilloch	106	yes
1916	St Charles Institution for Children (closed 1983)	Carstairs	83	yes
1923	Birkwood Hospital	Lesmahagow	316	yes
1924	Gogarburn Hospital	Edinburgh	781	yes
1924	St Joseph's Hospital	Rosewell	235	n/k
1925	Broadfield Hospital & Mechison & Elderslie	Renfrewshire	93 114 20	yes
1929	Caldwell House Hospital (closed 1985)	Renfrewshire	111	yes
1929/36	Lennox Castle Hospital	Glasgow	1490	yes
1948	Woodlands Hospital, Cults	Aberdeenshire	137	yes
1948	Ladybridge Hospital, Banff	Aberdeenshire	568	yes
1948	Glen Lomond Hospital (closed 1987)	Fife	132	n/k
1956	East Fortune	East Lothian	121	yes
1968	Lynebank Hospital	Fife	420	yes
1969	Craig Phadrig Hospital	Inverness	229	yes
1903	Children's Home Hospital	Strathblane	n/k	yes
n/k	Maud	Grampian	6	n/k
n/k	Armistead's	Tayside	n/k	n/k
n/k	Bellefield	Lanarkshire	104	n/k
n/k	St Mary's, Borders	Borders	57	n/k
n/k	St Aidan's, Borders	Borders	57	n/k
n/k	St Mary's, Barrhead	Renfrewshire	85	n/k
n/k	Ravenspark	Ayrshire	42	n/k
n/k	Dunlop House (closed 1991)	Ayrshire	71	n/k

Courtesy of Scottish Consortium for Learning Disabilities



Residents under the age of 18 in learning disability hospitals at different time periods

Year	Number of children resident in learning disability institutions	Source
1914	About 669 children in Larbert (RSNH) and Baldovan (Strathmartine)	Hutchison (2011)
1931	888 children aged 5-18	Hansard (1931)
1969	1533 children	SHHD & SHSC (1970)
1972	1200 children aged 5-16 and 170 children aged under 5 = 1370 in total.	SHHD & SED (1972)
1975	1135 children	Richardson (1975)
1980	551 children aged 0-15	Farquharson (1984)
1982-84	About 632 children & young people resident in hospital (aggregated figures so not a single snapshot)	SED (1984)
1988	670 admissions of children aged under 16 (635 for planned temporary respite)	SHHD & SHSAC (1992)
2007	1 young person aged under 18 in a learning disability hospital	MWC (2008)

Courtesy of Scottish Consortium for Learning Disabilities

Built on the Bangour Estate by Edinburgh District Lunacy Board, Bangour Village Hospital officially opened in 1906, though patients were admitted from 1904.
The Hospital was purpose built for Edinburgh's lunatic paupers and housed patients with mental health problems for almost a hundred years.

Bangour Village Hospital circa 1940s. Image courtesy of Lothian Health Archives

Bangour Village Hospital was set up as a new style of psychiatric hospital, based on an asylum in Germany. This was a colony system, aimed to give patients a calming environment during their stay. Patients were encouraged to live and work together in communities with few physical restrictions while, producing their own food and day to day essentials. Under close care of nursing and medical staff, who mostly lived alongside patients.

"Bangour Village Hospital, which predated the general hospital, had been built as a state-of-the-art hospital, for people with psychiatric problems, mental health problems but also with learning difficulties."
Frances, 80, Board Member with Disability West Lothian

The village incorporated its own railway connection, farm, bakery, workshops, recreation hall, school, shop, library and later a church.
The hospital was a series of 32 villas, housing between 25-40 patients each.
The original site was 960 acres, and very isolated with a private rail line. The Wee Bangour Express would travel the mile and a half to the hospital from the village of Dechmont.

By the end of 1905, there were 200 patients in residence, but during the First World War in 1915, the hospital was requisitioned by the army for military use. Patients were displaced and relocated to other asylums across Scotland until it returned to being a hospital in 1922.

Bangour Village Hospital nurses and patients circa 1920s. Image courtesy of Lothian Health Archives

1939 saw the construction of a large annex which was built to increase capacity, and after the Second World War this annex became Bangour General Hospital with the Bangour Village remaining an institution for psychiatric patients.

Patients being encouraged to clean the wards.
Image courtesy of Lothian Health Archives

"Bangour village was very much seen as, for outcasts, it was very much, originally, a bit of a stigma for people going into Bangour Village, and jokes were made about it. That over the years has changed, attitudes towards people with mental health issues has changed considerably...Now we don't have a hospital just for people with mental health issues, people are more integrated in the community, and we try to keep people at home now, as much as possible. So there's been a big change in the public's attitudes. I think because there's been a lot of campaigns and more publicity about disability and about mental illness, and people are now more aware that this can happen to anybody."

"I think some of it was stigma, in a way that people with disabilities...were'nae as important...there was an attitude that you lock people up, maybe not lock up but...you give them special places to go rather than integrate them into the community."

"When I look back on it, interviewing people and assessing people, that they probably had low self-esteem and a low opinion of themselves. They probably saw themselves as second class citizens."
"I remember …some of the attitudes in the past were abysmal, people were admitted to hospital because they…had an illegitimate baby, or they're family disowned them...It must have been horrendous in the prewar days, and just after the war when people didn't feel...part of society, they were locked away and forgotten about. Some of them…well I would say, the majority, should never have been in that environment."
Robert C, Had a long career in mental health and worked in Bangour Village Hospital

Nurses and residents circa 1980s.
Image courtesy of Lothian Health Archives

The construction of St John's hospital in Livingston and a shift towards community care led to the closure of the hospital in 2004.

In 2009, a local resident had enquired about an empty area in her local cemetery and discovered that the area contained hundreds of unmarked graves.
She did some research and discovered that the graves belonged to patients from Bangour Village Hospital.
Further research uncovered that there were 566 unmarked graves in Ecclesmachan cemetery, 191 in Uphall cemetery and 74 in Loaninghill cemetery.

Memorial stones have now been placed in each cemetery, and the inscription reads:

***“In memory of the many patients of
Bangour Village Hospital buried here.
Troubled in life,
May they be at peace for ever”***

Memorial at Ecclesmachan Cemetery. Image courtesy of Catherine Fergusson [2008]

“I stood before a Parliament in Edinburgh, a few years ago, and tried to argue for a more centralised Scottish disability authority. One that was able to deal specifically with problems facing all disabled, right across the board.”
Billy W, 65, on his campaigning history.

The end of the Second World War saw a movement of campaigns by people with a disability and their families to fight for a better quality of life. The 40s and 50s saw many mass campaigns organised like that in 1951 where 800 members of the Ex-servicemen Limbless Association, from all parts of the country marched, to Westminster to protest about the Government’s failure to increase war disability pensions.

The end of the decade saw many campaigning charities formed including The National Association for Civil Liberties, the National Association for Backward Children (which became MIND then MENCAP) The Leonard Cheshire Association, the Spastics Society (now SCOPE) and hundreds more soon followed.
By the 1960s, the civil rights movement began to take shape in America and disability advocates saw the opportunity to join forces alongside other minority groups to demand equal treatment, equal access and equal opportunity for people with disabilities.

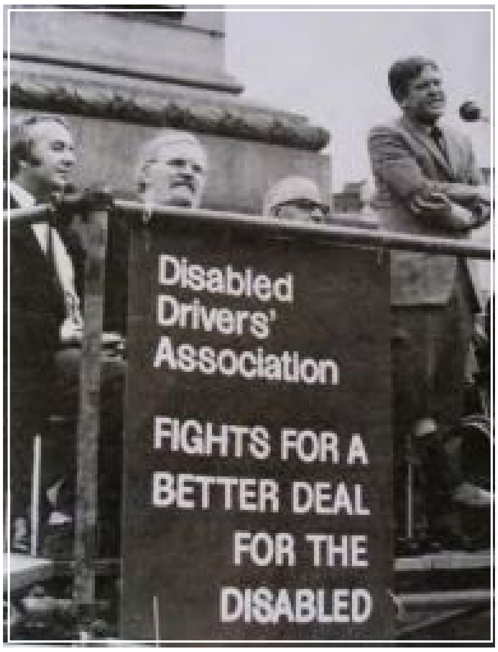
Many people with a disability, who felt frustrated at having little control over the decisions made in their lives, were inspired by the civil rights movement and by the late sixties, a new Disability Rights Movement was taking place in the UK. The movement grew in strength and fought to increase pressure on the Government to improve the lives of disabled people and to end the discrimination many continued to experience.

The seventies saw numerous such campaigns all over Britain including a protest march in the Lothians along Princes Street, in Edinburgh for the Scottish branch of the Disabled Income Group, set up by activist Margaret Blackwood, who had Muscular Dystrophy. Their March on Wheels saw over a thousand people demand social and economic justice for people with a disability in Scotland. Edinburgh also saw rallies and demonstrations for improved independent mobility and more accessible cars for people with a disability, and was backed by Lord Snowden, who himself had a disability caused by polio.

Wheelchair protest march along Princes Street in Edinburgh by the Disabled Income Group, Scotland. - © The Scotsman Publications Ltd.

"We'd drive up to the Scottish office, or we would go down to different places, I remember driving up and signs hanging out the window and stuff like that, there was a lot, there was hundreds of us, we were all in the same boat, we were all different kinds, but it was actually Lord Snowdon and his efforts to change the law that had it removed, I don't think the Government cared. In Edinburgh we used to go in convoys of those things [laughs] those wee cars, blocking roads....way back in the seventies."

Billy W, 65,on the Invacar campaign



1970s rally in Trafalgar Square for better mobility provision. Image courtesy of Historic England.

New legislation came in 1983 and changed things for the better, but it could be better still. Around this time sweeping legislation took place in the field of Mental Health with the Mental Health Act (1983) and a new Code of Practice, and as a result many advocacy projects were being set up around the country. The following year saw an international conference on self-advocacy which led users and supporters to establish the first People First group.

In the early 1980s a Patients Committee had been set up and played a key role in three of its residents winning their right to vote. James B shares his memories with us.

"People in Gogarburn, quite a few of us wanted to vote… we got the forms, to be on the register...we went to register, "Sorry to say, we cannot accept hospital cause it's no fixed address."
So we decided to complain, we complained to register office, well the council, about it… he said we cannae help ye… ye'll have to through court. And quite a few o' us…Jimmy McIntosh, Ali Grayhill, those two have passed away, so am only the one that's still here.
Ali G spent about 45-50yrs in Gogarburn, Jimmy McIntosh spent about forty years in hospital, and I spent about twenty years in different hospitals along the line.
I got told you were not allowed to vote cause no fixed address, so ye had to challenge it, take it to court. So we applied to legal aid to get a solicitor to help us, a lawyer, it was Ian Kennedy, who was the lawyer who helped us. And went to court, that day and the boy said
"There are patients who have been in there 5, 20, 50 year and it is a fixed address it cannot be an unfixed address."

“And the Sherriff looked at it said “It is a fixed address!”
So you won that part but before we got a chance to leave the Edinburgh Council stood up and said “we want to challenge in hight court”
So it took about six months to go through the system.
And we went into high court that day, we were only in high court about five minutes, he said “I’ve passed this, it should not be challenged”
So we walked out laughing. All that money wasted. By that time, the vote was over and done with, so they decided to start moving patients out.”
James Burt, former resident of Gogarburn Hospital, on challenging his right to vote.

In a ruling which set a Scottish precedent Sheriff Principal Frederick O’Brein overturned a decision by Lothian Region’s electoral registration officer that the three men were entitled to vote.
Following on from their win in court in 1984, a collective group who had been meeting at Pefferbank Training Centre, had heard about their gumption in taking on hospital policy and invited James and some of his fellow service users to the Centre to talk about their experiences, from there, Lothian Rights Group was formed.
The group was supported by several professionals including hospital staff, and social workers, as momentum grew it evolved into the Scottish Federation of Independent Advocacy Organisations and would eventually become People First (Scotland). In 1989 Lothian Rights Group organised one of the first Scottish Conferences for people with learning disabilities in Edinburgh, which was attended by around 200 people. The three-day conference is documented in their video ‘Let Us Be Heard’. James continued his involvement with the group for many years and in 2000 was named the Vice Chair.

“I’ve been involved in People First for a very long time, about the closure of long stay hospitals…people should live in the community.
At that time it was called Lothian Rights Group, that was ‘84, and from there, ‘89, I think, it changed its name to People First.
Well, we were closing long stay hospitals, been involved in that, the Keys to Life...Protests, through the Government, different committees, we went to big meetings, just asking when hospitals wiz gonna close, when they were gonna close, all that stuff. Shared stories with them, published stuff in different kinds of magazines, there was a book wrote about Gogarburn, a book called “Blue Deep Sea.” [Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea].
Because quite a few patients who were involved in...People First at the time, there’s quite a few of them who have moved on. And quite a few of us got together and wrote different stories about staff and the hospitals, and how we were getting treated.” James Burt, on his involvement with People First Scotland.

The eighties saw other hospitals come together and set up patient councils including Bangour Village Hospital in 1988 to talk about issues which affected them within the hospital and it was from the roots of this self-advocacy group that Friendset, which became the Mental Health Advocacy Project, in West Lothian, was born.

"The impact that had on my job now is that advocacy became a legal right for people with a mental health problem, so that made quite a difference to people and for us." Kathy, 61, worked within mental health.

The following decade saw even more activity by people with a disability lobbying the Government for a law that makes discrimination against a person because of their disability illegal.

Many people also began to fight against the way in which people with a disability were portrayed protesting against being seen often as objects of pity, and there was continuing campaigning for better access to buildings and facilities.

1992 protest in London about the depiction of people with a disability on television. Image courtesy of Historic England.

Image courtesy of Dave Lupton, a cartoonist with a disability 1997

The end of the nineties saw the Government establish a Disability Rights Commission which could enforce the rights of disability legislation, and was responsible for advising employers on how to secure equal acceptance of employees with a disability in the workplace.

In West Lothian a Disability Equality Scheme was developed in partnership with Mental Health Advocacy (West Lothian), Disability West Lothian and Ace Advocacy to promote positive attitudes towards people with disabilities and tackle the inequality that many people with a disability faced within their lives.

West Lothian Council was also seeking out the input and opinions of people with a disability through forums such as West Lothian Learning Disability Forurm and the West Lothian Access Committee.

“I have been involved in local and national [campaigns]…I was involved in the..Scottish Disability Equality Forum, I’ve been in a lot of campaigns. I was the Chairperson at one point. I was also involved in the local Labour Group for a wee while, but I got fed up with that. Now I just focus on disabled people in the local community. The Scottish Disability Equality Forum works with the Scottish Government to improve the lives of disabled folk and have had various campaigns...we felt it was successful.”

Gordon, 53, Livingston, born with Cerebral Palsy on campaigning throughout his life.

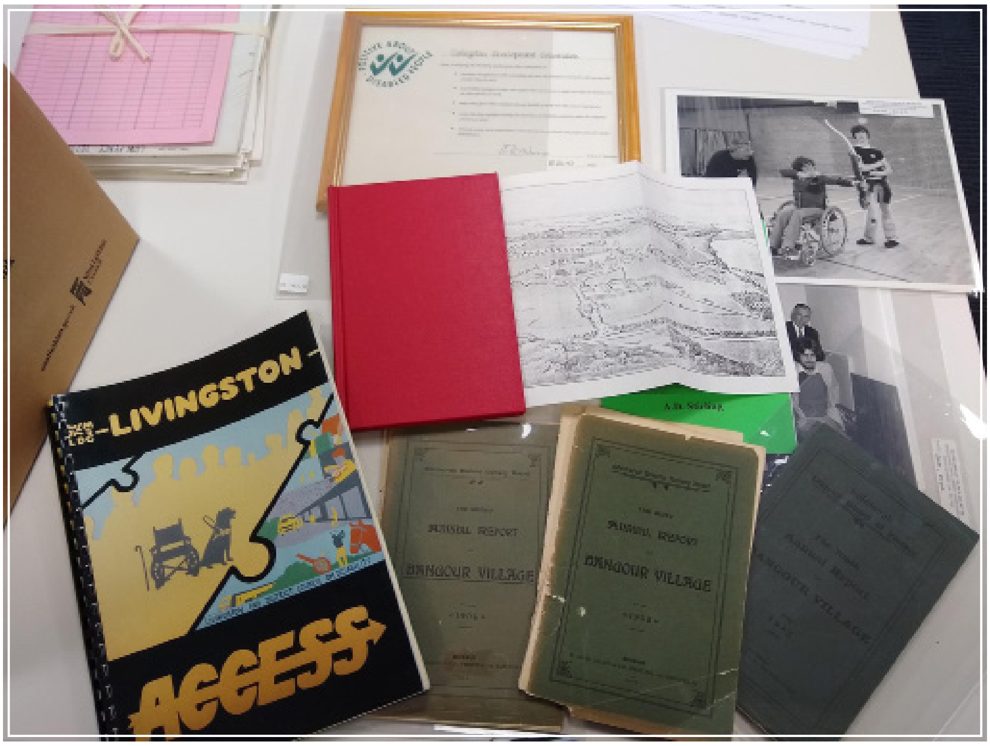
Volunteers from the Disability Equality Scheme in 2007.
Image courtesy of Disability West Lothian

For many people with a disability in West Lothian, campaigning for issues such as equal rights, better access and increased participation in public life has led to much improvement. Legislation such as the 1995 Disability Discrimination Act or 2010 Equality Act has been a positive leap forward but seems there is still not enough change...

“I’m not involved in the wider community as much as I used to be. I feel maybe a bit isolated. I know I want to do something, but I don’t know what to do with my life. It feels like…well let’s do that, but we’ve done that before.
What I think is in the last five years, it is more challenging for disabled communities have taken a hit, because of lack of money for them, that able bodied are spending. They are having to prove why we still need that facility or money. It’s just disheartening.
The fact that councils are having to save money, and in West Lothian they have taken away The Taxicab Scheme. We have an alarm system in the house for health and safety and prior to last year, we didn’t pay for it. Now there is a yearly charge. Some of the services have been taken away. I fully understand that there has to be cuts, but they seem to be aimed at disabled and elderly, an easy cut. I feel disappointed and frustrated and what’s the point?”

Gordon, 53, Livingston, born with Cerebral Palsy on campaigning throughout his life.

Save our Ability Centre Campaign
Image Courtesy of Save Our Ability Centre Facebook Group



Materials from West Lothian Archives.
Image courtesy of Disability West Lothian.

Afterword

This booklet comes out of the interviews and research taken from Back to the Future West Lothian. The people who contributed to this project, through the interviews, talked about their experiences of having a lived experience of disability over the past 40 years. We set out to explore how disabled people had shaped West Lothian's landscapes, and we only managed to uncover a small section of this heritage. The personal stories we collected cover so much more than we could share here in this booklet, sadly due to Covid 19 restrictions and time constraints, we were not able to include all of the stories shared with us.

The oral histories we collected will be deposited in West Lothian Archives, and copies of this booklet will be distributed across West Lothian Libraries.

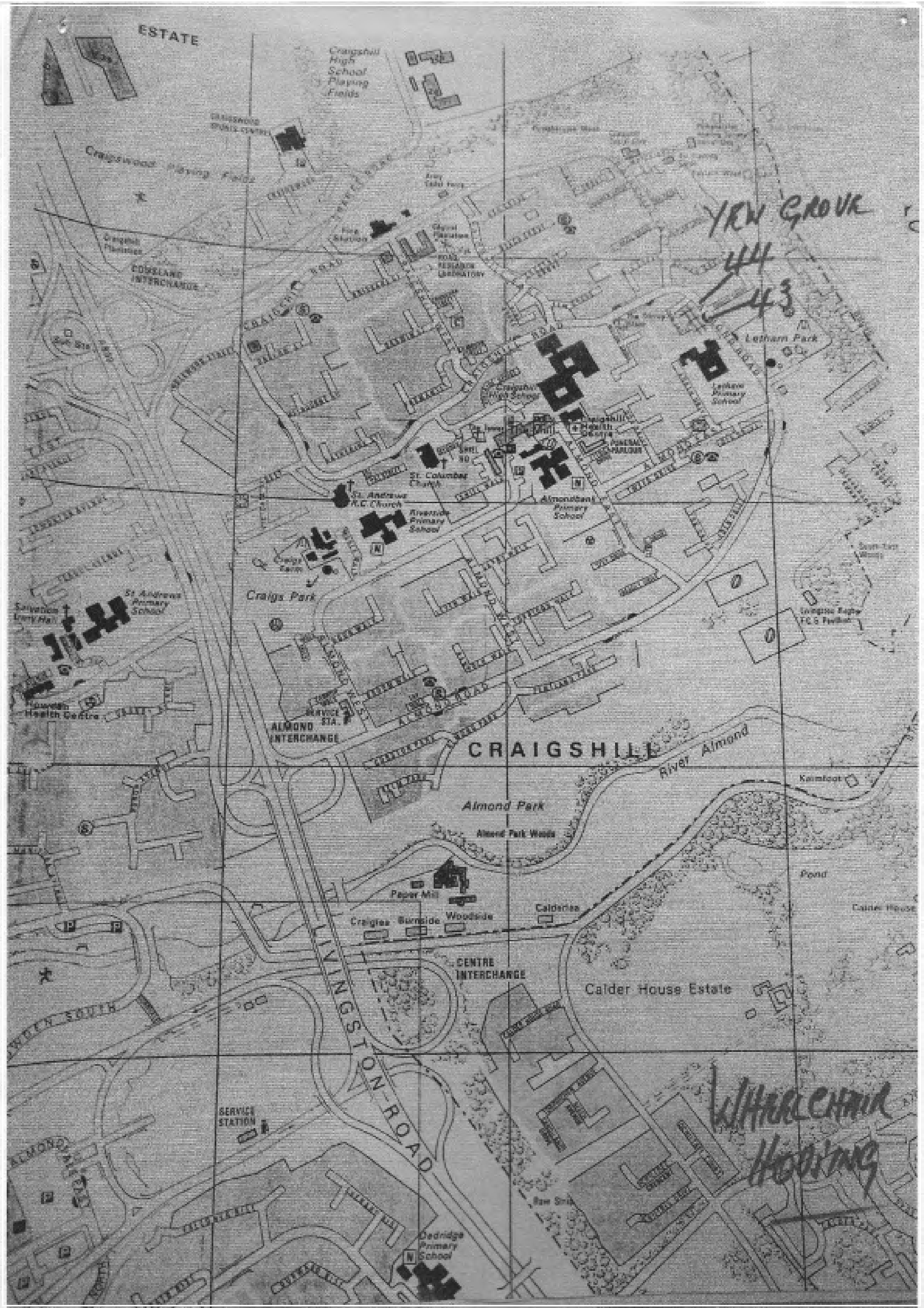


Image courtesy of West Lothian Archives

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to everyone who contributed to, and supported this project.
Heritage Lottery Fund, The Living Memory Association, West Lothian Reminiscence Centre, West Lothian Archives, Lothian Health Archives, West Lothian Museums Service, People First Scotland, Linburn Centre, Jim Thomson, West Lothian Voluntary Network, The Ability Centre, Helen-Jane Shearer, Konnect Magazine, Sue Morrison, Oral History Research and Training Consultancy, Craigshill Good Neighbourhood Network, Linlithgow Library, Carers of West Lothian, Enable, West Calder & Harburn Community Development Trust, Deans Community High School

Michael Boyce, Carmel Hunter, Helen Jeffery, Atanas Dimitrov, Scott Walker, Bilal Iqbal, Gordon Mungall, Moira Mungall, Jim McEwan, Beth Brownlee, Josie McMillan, Colin Williamson, Nicole Paterson, Cameron Glasgow, Niamh Vance-Robertson, Craig Sutherland, Leighton Westwood, Hannah Wood.

And all of our respondents who shared their memories with us.

Aileen Liddell, Cat Liddell, Billy Wilson, Colin Williamson, James Burt, Scott Walker, Gordon Mungall, Moira Mungall, Sammie Vance, Jo McPhillips, James, Jorden Smith, Francis David Laidlaw, Keith Boucher, Lynne Boucher, John, Frances Currie, Kathy, Margaret Kelly, Mary Winters, Susan Taylor, James Hughes, Geraldine Adam, Toby, Robert Cook.

Booklet produced by
Gillian Alexander
and
Debbie Forsyth

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Map of Livingston with planning details for ‘Wheelchair Houses’ Howden
Cover photo planning Map of Deans, 1983
- Images courtesy of West Lothian Archives