

Changing Futures

— Stoke-on-Trent —

Case Study - Access Denied: How Environmental Barriers Limited Community Participation for a Wheelchair User

Introduction

Tom is an individual with limited mobility who relies on a motorised wheelchair and scooter to maintain his independence and access the community. This case highlights the barriers people with physical disabilities can face when living in temporary accommodation, and how these barriers can impact both community participation and the support available to them.

Background

Tom was living in hotel accommodation while longer-term housing options were explored. Although the accommodation provided temporary stability, it was not fully suited to his mobility needs. Practical issues within the environment made day-to-day living more difficult and affected his ability to access community activities that were important to his wellbeing. Tom remained positive throughout and was keen to engage in local activities, including angling and other opportunities within the community.

Barriers identified

- Hotel accommodation was not fully accessible or designed around Tom's mobility needs.
- Daily practical challenges within the room impacted his independence.
- Suitable accessible accommodation options were extremely limited.
- Reliable charging facilities for his motorised wheelchair and scooter were not available.
- Mobility equipment charging issues restricted Tom's ability to access the community and attend activities.
- Community outings and appointments sometimes had to be cancelled due to insufficient charge on his equipment.
- These barriers also affected the ability of support workers to provide effective community-based support.

Customer Goals

- Maintain his independence and mobility.
- Access community activities and hobbies, including angling.
- Reduce isolation and increase social connection.
- Live in accommodation that met his physical needs.
- Access the community safely and consistently.

What we did

Tom was supported by a **Recovery Community Coordinator (RCC) from Expert Citizens**, whose role was to help him build community connections, access meaningful activities, and reduce social isolation.

The RCC worked alongside Tom to:

- Build a supportive and trusting relationship.
- Explore opportunities for community engagement and social activities.
- Support access to local facilities and hobbies.
- Identify barriers preventing participation in community life.
- Advocate for practical solutions to accessibility issues within the accommodation.
- Raise concerns regarding the lack of suitable charging facilities for mobility equipment.
- Highlight the impact that environmental barriers were having on Tom's independence and wellbeing.

A key challenge for the RCC was that planned community activities could not always take place because Tom's wheelchair or scooter could not be reliably charged. This created barriers not only for Tom but also for the RCC's ability to deliver recovery-focused support and promote meaningful community participation.

Outcome

The case highlighted that accessibility involves more than physical access to a building. While Tom remained motivated and positive, the lack of suitable accommodation and charging facilities created avoidable barriers to independence and social inclusion.

The most significant issue identified was the inability to reliably charge his wheelchair and scooter, which directly limited Tom's ability to access the community and participate in activities that supported his wellbeing. It also reduced opportunities for the Recovery Community Coordinator to provide effective community-based support.

This case demonstrates the importance of ensuring temporary accommodation is genuinely fit for purpose for people with mobility needs, including consideration of mobility equipment requirements, so that individuals can remain independent, connected to their community, and able to participate in meaningful activities.