1. **Temporary accommodation and Social Housing**

I did not wake up one day with a PhD in disability, the whole experience has, and continues to be, utterly brutalising, having to interact with government services and the world at large, the latter with their intrusive, clumsy comments and jobsworthy attitudes that cover up a cognitive dissonance.

I became disabled through illness in March 2019, effectively becoming housebound in a rented flatshare in Camden as I could no longer climb the stairs. I was admitted to hospital in May 2019, and filled in a homeless application via Camden council in July 2019. In September 2019 I was essentially forced to accept unsuitable temporary housing upon being discharged from hospital, where I was trapped due to inaccessibility for two years, where I was not able to access the bathroom.

During that two years, twice I was offered the same hostel room, once in March 2020 and again in January 2021, which was completely unsuitable for someone with my disability. However, what was truly terrifying for me, was that both my PA at the time, and the hostel staff, and Camden council, all thought the accommodation was suitable. This caused an enormous amount of stress, not to mention the huge amount of time it took me to gather and submit the asked for evidence to prove that it was unsuitable, only to be offered the same hostel room less than a year later, with huge amounts of stress yet again, and having to get a solicitor from Disability Law to submit evidence at, no doubt, a substantial cost to the government. It is clear to me that all homeless people, via the homelessness legislation, are treated equally as having the same needs. I would really hate anyone becoming disabled to have to go through what I went through.

**2. Descriptions and disability needs in Social Housing**

My experience of social housing staff is that they need disability training. I went to view a property a few weeks ago, as described below:

FLAT A - 27 GRAFTON CRESCENT, NW1 8SL

1 bedroom wheelchair accessible flat (double) in an individual block. Ground floor. **Fully adapted property with kitchen fully adjusted, moveable worktops, wet room, wide door frames.** Wet room (no bath). Gas central heating. Garden. 12 months starter tenancy followed by an assured tenancy if all terms of the contract have been satisfied. No Right To Acquire. This is an Affordable Rent Property. No pets allowed (excluded guide & service animals). One week rent is payable in advance. Viewing maybe carried out virtually or limited to applicant only be able to attend. This will be confirmed nearer the viewing date. Landlord: Origin Housing Association.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Accessible housing category | A-Wheelchair Accessible Throughout |

The property was completely unsuitable for a wheelchair user. I spoke with Amran Ahmed (I haven't got permission to use their name - I'm assuming we've run out of time for this?) - Housing Officer and advised the entrance was not accessible. The gate, dustbins, large metal door, then a tight turn into the front door. Then not able to access the bathroom without some difficulty as the door was in the way,  there was also a door in the way to both the bedroom and the living room. The living room space was tiny, not enough room to turn a wheelchair. **I asked why the description was so inaccurate?** My time was wasted, together with expensive taxis. It also was not near enough to any amenities. The housing officer said that there had been a wheelchair user living in the property previously. **I said that it wasn't suitable for any wheelchair user and that just because someone with a wheelchair might have been in there before, did not mean it was suitable, explaining that I had just been living in a temporary property for two years, where I was unable to access the bathroom.**

**3. Living independently category**

Below is a snapshot of an experience with an OT, who came to my temporary accommodation earlier this year. Again, I don't have permission to use her name, just leave it out.

**A brief exploration in Ableist issues...**

Dear Magda,

I have  a healthy sense of shame and as such I have no desire to shame others.

I do, however, have a strong conviction and determination to illustrate the personal impact ableism has. I want to point out that it's not my intention to blame you, rather, to get to the bottom of an ongoing and chronic experience for me, and am utilising our communication and your visit to hopefully highlight and illustrate what is actually happening. You are the 4th OT to visit me, and each time I learn a little more.

Time and again I have communicated my foundational needs, my basic needs to live. I can see very clearly that there is a general inability, across the board, to tune in to specific disability needs and this is potentially dangerous. Dangerous, because certain assumptions are made, and a lot of the careful information that I spent time putting together gets lost, is not seen, it's brushed aside or overlooked as unimportant, and this has led to my basic needs not being met. The basic need of being able to have access to a toilet. The basic need of being able to shower. I understand that temporary accommodation does not have to be perfect, but I have and continue to suffer because of my needs not being understood or communicated accurately within Camden Council departments.

I am addressing a couple of points from your email following your visit; for visual ease, I've surrounded paragraphs in quotes; I have spoken with my solicitor, Priya (cc'd into this) earlier today and she will provide the additional information that housing have asked for.

For me, the purpose of your visit last week was to review my current temporary accommodation. You were not here to assess my bed or chair.

"Housing also ask if your bed or chair is specialist. I could not see any evidence of this as they both looked standard to me". This comment highlights the issue of ableism. I suggest that they looked standard to you because of ableism. It is a dangerous assumption in saying my bed and chair look 'standard'.

"I spoke with my colleague about Holmes Road as she knows the facilities there\* and whilst it seems the room and bathroom could meet your needs the kitchen is not fully adapted. I have suggested that in order to be able to prepare and cook food safely and independently you will need a height adjustable work surface units, sink and induction hob and eye level oven." \* Firstly, I would suggest that your colleague knows the Holmes Road facilities from an ableist perspective. An ableist perspective is dangerous, because vital information potentially gets missed in the assumptions that are made. In this example above, it would seem that the remedy is simply to have things at eye level, when there are several other vital factors that need to be taken into consideration. These additional factors are in my solicitors report. I have also attached a picture of my current kitchen table, which visually shows all the items that I need around it.

To give you an idea, the Holmes Road space is less than half the size of my current accommodation. Every item of furniture, fridge, cooker or cupboard has to have enough space around it so I can access it face on. I then have to have enough space to be able to reverse and manoeuvre away.  You experienced first hand the difficulties of us both in my current space.

I don't know if there is any way for Camden council to be able to receive the information I am so carefully endeavouring to communicate in this email, or whether they will continue to disregard my basic human rights, and my disability rights.

I have reached a limit of what I am willing to put up with. Not all disability needs are the same and not all homelessness needs are the same. What I see as the council's continuing inability to recognise my specific needs has, and continues to have a devastating personal impact, in terms of both my human, and disability rights.

Please pass this on to your colleagues in housing that you spoke with; I trust it will be informative.

Many thanks for your support and the opportunity to work all of this out!

Warm regards,

Kimaya Crolla-Younger Dip. Psych.

**Her response, 14 June...**

Dear Kimaya,

Thank you for your email.

I apologise if my enquiry into whether your bed and chair is specialist was perceived in a negative way it was not my intention, housing had asked me to find out this information as an OT. I did not see this request until after I had visited you.

I am also sorry that after visits from 4 OT’s you feel that your chronic needs are not being met.

It is my intention to support you to live as independently as possible with the resources available to me in the property that you are in.

 I agree with you that the temporary accommodation you are in currently is not suitable at all and is not full wheelchair accessible.

I have stated in my case notes following my visit that the entrance to the property is difficult for you as the front door is heavy to manoeuvre in a wheelchair, the living area is cramped and does not allow turning space for your wheelchair neither does the kitchen/bathroom area. The kitchen is not adapted and is therefore dangerous for you to attempt to cook or move hot food around.

The bathroom space is completely inaccessible for you as is the shower cubicle and toilet.

These are issues that I cannot address as the property is temporary so I cannot suggest any major adaptations.

 You are finding it very difficult (if not impossible at times) to empty your commode, the only solution to this in your current property is to request support with an assistant to do this through Adult Social Care (ASC). This is the same with the issue with showering there are no other options other than to strip wash which you could do more thoroughly with an assistant supporting you.

I know that food preparation, cooking and transferring food is also something that is difficult and risky at times which is why I would also suggest that you ask for some support with this. We did talk briefly about me requesting some care for you but you stated that this was something you wanted to sort out in your own time.

I have requested a review of your wheelchair through Haringey Wheelchair service so if they are able to provide something to help you transfer hot drinks they may help although I suspect any additional tray on the front would add extra size and make it even more awkward to propel in the small space.

I have ordered the equipment we discussed and sent you information you might find helpful on where to access bathing facilities. Aside from this there isn’t anything else I can do from an Occupational Therapy perspective except to re iterate to housing that the property you are in at the present time is inappropriate for your needs.

 With regards to my comments on Holmes Road I was actually saying the kitchen is not appropriate there as it is not fully accessible so you would not be able to safely use it. The space of the room may be half of what you are currently in but in theory it is wheelchair accessible. It may be that you have to consider storing some of your possessions if you were to move into a room that size what I meant. It is supposed to be a temporary solution not your permanent home.

 **I found your email extremely interesting and have taken on board your points about Ableism. I have decided to do some training to learn more about this in the hope that it will improve my ongoing practice.**
 Kind regards,

Magda

 Magda Basile
Occupational Therapist
Supporting People
London Borough of Camden

**I explained to the OT about not being able to access my bathroom and the humiliation of not being able to bathe. Her recommendations are below, which seem completely unrealistic and out of touch with any sense of reality.**

Dear Kimaya,

It has been very difficult finding information about accessible public baths or showers in London. I asked several colleagues who suggested places like the Better Gym at 5PS or Prince of Wales Road. They all have accessible swimming pools, but then I don’t think you could just go there to use their showers. Also because of Covid I understand people going for a swim have to arrive and undress next  to the pool (costume underneath) and go straight in to the pool. Then only use the shower and changing rooms after a swim which doesn’t help you much.

The other option may be accessible spas.

I have found this link for disabled spa holidays: <https://www.google.com/search?q=accessible+spas+in+London&rlz=1C1GCEA_enGB946GB946&oq=accessible+spas+in+London&aqs=chrome..69i57j33i22i29i30l9.9537j1j15&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8>

And this one: <https://www.spabreaks.com/place/london-greater-london/max_distance/50/categories/accessible-spa>

There’s this one in St Pancras? <https://www.spabreaks.com/venues/st-pancras-spa#spa-and-leisure>

They are not something you can use all the time but perhaps you could treat yourself? You might try one of those discount sites like Treatwell to see if you can get an offer? Otherwise it seems that this is not something this is available in this day and age - I guess as most people have access to bathing facilities.

I called Haringey Wheelchair Service (you are now under them as you are registered at Haringey GP). I explained the difficulties you are having with the castors on the front of your wheelchair making it difficult for you to turn or propel etc. They have asked me to make a referral so that they can look at your environment and review the wheelchair. They told me that it could take up to 6 weeks before they come and see you. Their number is: 020 3074 2850. I will make the referral today and suggest that you call them in a couple of weeks to ask where your referral is on the waiting list to give them a bit of a nudge.

Kind regards,

Magda

Magda Basile
Occupational Therapist
Supporting People
London Borough of Camden

**Unworkable Recommendations**

Hi Magda,

Many thanks for your reply and more detailed information.

I believe that your intention is to support me to live as independently as possible with the resources available to you in the property that I am in. You've expressed both an interest in, as well as an openness to learning how to be more accurately in alignment to your clients needs. So, with that in mind, here are some more thoughts, perceptions and requests from me.

Recommendation, when you use the term, particularly in your capacity as an OT, gives the word a certain weight. That a recommendation is a workable option. Please, if I may suggest, that an option is not workable if it directly violates either disability or human rights, or is not actually possible. My experience of both your comments and recommendations, again, touch on two areas for me - ableism and human rights.

I am uncomfortable with your recommendations as follows:

You are not the first one to suggest a carer as a way to resolve humiliating issues that I am made to endure on an ongoing basis, due to my not being able to access a bathroom. This suggestion completely fails to see both my actual needs and why I am unable to take care of them myself. By suggesting a carer to assist with bathing, when I am perfectly capable of meeting my own needs, takes away my dignity. The only reason I cannot shower is because my accommodation limits it. My issues are caused by a lack of space AND accessibility, adding another person in the shape of a carer into the mix does not help in any way.

"...This is the same with the issue with showering there are no other options other than to strip wash which you could do more thoroughly with an assistant supporting you." What assumptions are you making to lead you to this statement? What is making you think that this could be done more effectively with an assistant? I need to plainly advise you that it cannot. It is impossible to strip wash in the kitchen. Firstly, there is not enough space in the kitchen for me to effectively strip wash safely. Secondly, I cannot stand to wash. Please hear this. I would suggest that the roots of your thinking here lay in ableism. As you are aware, this is the fourth time I am communicating this information to an OT, and the fourth time it has not been heard or understood correctly. I have come to realise that it is ableist to think that all it takes is a carer to fix things, when issues are way more nuanced. I cannot stand and do things. Having a carer does not help with this. Please see this.

"I have requested a review of your wheelchair through Haringey Wheelchair service so if they are able to provide something to help you transfer hot drinks they may help although I suspect any additional tray on the front would add extra size and make it even more awkward to propel in the small space." I ask that you withdraw the recommendation of a tray. This is not what we spoke about. I asked about the front wheels, they hinder my mobility and run into my feet.

Giving enough time to thinking sensitively in regards to the impact to your clients wellbeing that any recommendation may have. I would suggest that your department create a collaborative awareness document that is inclusive of the potential needs of differing abilities, without this I fail to see how any kind of assessment can be accurate. I do understand your limited scope as an OT, but I have very much woken up to what I see is happening with my case, and I must engage with it fully, and you are giving me an opportunity to do so.

Giving recommendations that are not actually executable can have devastating consequences to the client, that they alone must bear. I feel this is unacceptable.

I ask that you retract your recommendations and edit your report accordingly.

I believe that change is possible when we are willing to 'share' the uncomfortable feelings that are touched upon. I actually had a nightmare a couple of nights ago, about being put into an unsuitable home, where there were lots of people around me, but they couldn't hear me when I tried speaking with them. The overriding tone was one of such impotence.

There are other parts of your email I need to take further (elsewhere), but I shall leave it there for now and not give you any more to think about!

Solstice blessings to you,

Kimaya Crolla-Younger Dip. Psych.

'Stop measuring days by degree of productivity and start experiencing them by degree of Presence' ~Alan Watts

**4. I also had a very traumatising experience with my one and only trip with Taxicard:**

My first experience of a journey in a black cab with TaxiCard

Kimaya Crolla-Younger <kim.soulsister@gmail.com>
Fri, 30 Jul, 10:52
to taxicardcomplaint

Hi there,

My experience of travelling yesterday was very unsatisfactory. I am a manual wheelchair user and am used to using hospital transport to get to appointments. I am able to transfer into the backseat, and my chair folds up and goes in the boot. With this black cab taxi, I was wheeled into the cab, side on, no seat belt, my neck was cricked and I had to hold on to the rail the entire journey, it was very uncomfortable and I felt unsafe the entire time. I mentioned how uncomfortable I was to the driver and he said nothing. I need to be able to transfer onto the back seat of a vehicle and I cannot see how this is possible in a black cab.

I booked an Uber for my return journey and this was very comfortable.

Does taxicard use vehicles where I am able to transfer onto the back seat?

I look forward to hearing from you.

Kimaya Crolla-Younger Dip. Psych.

**I did not receive any reply from Taxicard, other than an acknowledgement of my email.**

**I then posted on Scope website:**

**What are people's experience in using the Taxicard service in London?**Novak33
Novak33
Member Posts: 2 Listener
August 14
What an eye opener it has been for me as a new wheelchair user! Due to lockdown I hadn't been able to take advantage of the Taxicard service and tried it for the first time a couple of weeks ago. Not only was the taxi 20 minutes late, my experience of travelling was nightmarish, arriving at my destination in tears.. As a manual wheelchair user, used to using hospital transport to get to appointments, I am able to transfer onto the backseat, and my chair folds up and goes in the boot. With this black cab taxi, I was wheeled into the cab, side on, no seat belt, my neck was cricked and I had to hold on to the rail the entire journey, it was really awful and I felt unsafe the entire time. I mentioned how uncomfortable I was to the driver and he said nothing. I've since sent a complaint and had no useful response, despite chasing it up.

I booked an Uber Assistance for my return journey and this was very comfortable. It seems to me that ComCab are firstly not really interested in the care and comfort of their passengers and they can't even be bothered to answer complaints. I believe the contract should be given to a company that have drivers with specialist training and comfortable vehicles. Currently Taxicard customers are being taken for a (very uncomfortable) ride, worse than if we were produce being carted around. London Councils need to sort out this service that I'm sure would be a lifeline for many, their service is not good enough.

I'm interested to hear others experiences?

Hello @Novak33 and a warm welcome to our community.  How are you keeping?

Oh heck, that doesn't sound like a good experience at all.  I'm sorry it fell short and left you feeling upset.

I wasn't familiar with the Taxicard service as I live 'up north' and did some digging.  Here's a link to the London Council Taxicard webpage for those who aren't too familiar either.

Inside the 'Welcome booklet' (note - clicking the link will prompt a download) it says:
It is a legal requirement that wheelchairs are properly secured inside the taxi and drivers are required to ensure this is done. Wheelchair users should be carried facing the rear of the taxi with their back to the partition with the driver.

The attachment belts in the taxi are designed to safely secure them and they will only work properly if the wheelchair is in this position. If a taxi driver says he cannot fit the wheelchair in this position, then it is not legal or safe to travel and passengers should not do so.

Some electric wheelchairs are too large to be secured inside a taxi and therefore cannot be carried legally. To check if your wheelchair can be carried, call Customer Services on 020 7908 0271 and select option 3 to discuss.

If you are travelling in a wheelchair you should mention this when you make your booking to ensure that a suitable vehicle is provided
Have you tried calling the Customer Services line to register a complaint?  Did you make your complaint via letter/email?  I wonder if it's the case they have backlogs, but I appreciate this doesn't excuse the lack of attention to accommodating your needs and poor service.

Thank you for telling us about it and I'd be interested in knowing others experiences too.
Online Community Co-ordinator

Want to tell us about your experience on the online community?  Talk to our chatbot and let us know.

Concerned about another member's safety or wellbeing? Flag your concerns with us.
Share on Twitter
Share on Facebook
Novak33
Novak33
Member Posts: 2 Listener
August 17
Thanks very much for your response and discovering that I was 'transported' illegally. I complained through the appropriate channels and waited the 10 days, twice, and got no response. I've now heard from a mobility services officer, so let's see what happens. I can see me writing to Transport for London, who won the contract as there are a couple of other points I'd like to raise about the service being sub-standard to say the least.

I tried again to get a response from Taxicard and tried a different email address with this heading **I have a problem and it seems to be being ignored, can you help?**

I then received the following:

Taxi Card <Taxi.Card@londoncouncils.gov.uk>
16 Aug 2021, 16:40
to me

Good afternoon.

Thank you for raising this with us, can you please confirm the Taxicard used so that this can be investigated with Customer Services? All the best.

Kind regards.

Rob Brazier
Mobility Services Officer

Robert.Brazier@londoncouncils.gov.uk

Taxicard is part of;
London Councils
59½ Southwark Street
London SE1 0AL

My reply:

Kimaya Crolla-Younger <kim.soulsister@gmail.com>
17 Aug 2021, 09:16
to Taxi

Hi Rob,

At last, a human being. My Taxicard number is HG2303190, I obviously used the card to make my booking, but when I asked the cab driver about swiping my card he said 'don't worry about it'.

I have subsequently discovered that I was 'transported' illegally, as per below:

It is a legal requirement that wheelchairs are properly secured inside the taxi and drivers are required to ensure this is done. Wheelchair users should be carried facing the rear of the taxi with their back to the partition with the driver.

The attachment belts in the taxi are designed to safely secure them and they will only work properly if the wheelchair is in this position. If a taxi driver says he cannot fit the wheelchair in this position, then it is not legal or safe to travel and passengers should not do so.

Some electric wheelchairs are too large to be secured inside a taxi and therefore cannot be carried legally. To check if your wheelchair can be carried, call Customer Services on 020 7908 0271 and select option 3 to discuss.

If you are travelling in a wheelchair you should mention this when you make your booking to ensure that a suitable vehicle is provided

I look forward to hearing from you.

Warm regards,

Taxi Card <Taxi.Card@londoncouncils.gov.uk>
23 Aug 2021, 16:30
to taxicardquery@comcab.co.uk, me

Hi team.

Can this be looked in to please and can I be CC’d in to the response? All the best.

Kind regards.

Rob Brazier
Mobility Services Officer

Robert.Brazier@londoncouncils.gov.uk

Taxicard is part of;
London Councils
59½ Southwark Street
London SE1 0AL

[www.londoncouncils.gov.uk](http://www.londoncouncils.gov.uk/)

**I received no reply at all.**

In the case of the OT, my experience of PIP, and other service providers, there is a gap in the accuracy in recording information and vital things get omitted, through the ablelist lens. for example, I realise I should have been awarded enhanced daily living , and it's too late to back date it now,though I am currently in a PIP review, which is proving to be nightmarish, the form is badly designed, and it is impossible for all disability needs to be captured on it. Many people will be suffering because of this. There are many other issues I have a lived experience of that I can share with you. I have run out of time and energy for now.

Please let me know if you need clarification of anything.