

## Case study

### Mobility help for Disabled People in Africa and the UK

Mobility help for Disabled people in Africa and the UK (Mobility help) was established as a charity in 2006 and registered with the Charity Commission in December of the same year. The charity was formed as a response to its founder and main promoter's experience of the health and adult social care system in the UK which did not accommodate his unique difference as a recently disabled man of African origin. The founder and the trustees had a vision of an organisation that will meet the cultural, faith and social needs of disabled Africans in the South East of London and connect them to services and benefits they are entitled to. The organisation also aims to educate statutory bodies and services about Africans and how to effectively engage with them and involve them in activities and forums they organise. The organisation since its formation has achieved a few milestones and outcomes for its members.

The Nigerian community of South East London, in particular the London Boroughs of Southwark, Lambeth and Lewisham are known for their tradition, culture, language, boisterousness and in particular the Yoruba sub-group their parties. Nigeria was a colony of the Great British Empire and became independent on 1<sup>st</sup> October 1960. The country is the most populated African country in the world with a population of close to 180 million people. At least 22m people of this population is disabled and the Yoruba's who constitute a majority of the membership of Mobility help for disabled people are one of the largest of the over 250 tribes that make up the country.

The people of Nigeria especially the Yoruba's of the South Western part of the country have a long history with the UK especially London. They have been migrating to the Capital since the early 1950s and continue to do so till this day. In the past the main reason for coming to the Capital was education but since the early 1990s many have migrated for a variety of reasons including economic, and the search for a better life. Increasingly many disabled Nigerians are migrating to the UK because they have heard about a society that accommodates their impairments and affords them choice and control. The Yoruba's like many minority ethnic groups in London are a people of faith (mainly Christianity and Islam and a bit of traditional religion) and rich tradition.

The Nigerian disabled community face a variety of barriers and problems because of their ethnicity and lack of formal education. Being a former colony of Great Britain, it is generally assumed that people from this community have a good command of the English language and thus rarely offer language translation to members of Mobility help or other disabled people from this community. It means many do not understand what they are entitled to and how to claim. There is also the reputation of the country Nigeria and how it's affecting disabled people. The country lately has had a notorious reputation of internet fraud and other vices. This has unfortunately led to many statutory or service staff stereo typing disabled people from this community and denying them services or benefits that should rightly be available to them. At one of the focus group

meetings Mobility help organised one of the participants said she was once told by a housing officer that she should be grateful for what has been offered to her and that 'after all she would not dream of such services in Nigeria.'

The multiplicity of this community's identity of faith, race and culture should have resulted in more positive outcomes for London especially a world capital and tourist destination which would have made the city even more colourful and attractive to tourists. However many, because of what they perceive as racism and stereotyping, would rather hide away in their homes and not engage with the mainstream. It is felt that if services are willing to provide translators and recognition of culture and differences many disabled Africans will engage better with services.

Mobility help's main challenge is getting its primary stakeholders (the Nigerian community) to engage with local services. Many disabled people of African origin are asylum seekers or some have no papers at all, and because of this many do not like engaging with statutory bodies for fear of getting arrested or deported. Another major challenge is lack of interest in information awareness activities because of extended family support (network of friends and family) that many of them have in place. Africans are also proud people and once they feel humiliated in their interaction with services they will rather stay away than to re-live that experience. It is frustrating that when the organisation organises an event many participants come either very late or not turn up at all, this has led to low turnout and poor use of resources and people's time.

Recently Mobility help organised a series of focus groups around recent changes to the welfare system and on personalisation. The discussions were made in a mix of English and Yoruba, the mother tongue of many who attended the meetings, and the meetings started with prayers. Refreshments were of Nigerian origin and participants were given travel money. The use of a familiar language and practice helped participants contribute actively to the discussions and offer advice on ways services can engage with them.

Mobility help is mainly run from its office in the London Borough of Southwark by volunteers, one of whom is the chair and main promoter of the charity. The volunteers organise social activities in the office and bring together disabled people of African origin and other groups to play board games and share sandwiches and refreshments. The volunteers currently run a food programme to homeless disabled people and people who have just been released from hospitals. Other activities they run are a befriending service, advice around benefits and information on where to get help in English and Yoruba, and doing research/focus groups on how services can engage with hard to reach groups.

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