

BIG IDEAS THAT CHANGED THE WORLD OF DISABILITY

Information Pack

What's the problem? Mike Oliver and the Social Model

Presented by
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About the Workshop

About Jan and Tom

Background to the Social Model

Social Snakes and Ladders- Instructions
Snakes and Ladders Board
Toolkit cards

About the Workshop

1. Introductions so we all get to meet each other
2. Tom and Jan will give a short talk with some slides
3. Play the board game online as a group
4. Discussion in breakout groups
5. Back together to share final thoughts

Please make sure that you have made the board game and cards
Had a couple of goes at playing the board game together

This will help you get the most out of the session.

HANDOUT: THE SOCIAL MODEL OF DISABILITY

The social model was developed from disabled people sitting together and talking, more than 50 years ago.

They tried to work out what happened to them when they tried to go out. They wanted to know how much of the problem was to do with them, and how much of the problem was to do with the wider world.

They decided that barriers made their lives more difficult. Those barriers might be people's attitudes to them. They might be lack of access. They might be discrimination.

This big idea turned the world on its head. Instead of people thinking that the problem was them, they realised that the problem was other people. Instead of accepting when there were barriers, they got angry.

This is the reason why we have accessible buses and trains in Britain. This is the reason why all public buildings are accessible. Disabled people complained about these barriers and they were changed.

Of course, we aren't there yet. Not everything is accessible. There are not enough Changing Places toilets, for example, although it is getting better. Sometimes people are left on trains, because assistance does not arrive in time. So it's not perfect.

The name for this 'big idea' is "the social model of disability". A famous disabled academic called Michael Oliver was first to write it down in a book, in 1990. One of his ideas was to re-write some of the questions that disabled people might be asked in a survey.

Instead of saying "What is wrong with you?", what do you think he asked?

[Answer: "What is wrong with society?"]

Instead of asking "How does your facial deformity or difference affect people?", What do you think he asked?

[Answer: 'How do other peoples' attitude to your difference affect communication?']

Instead of "What speech defect or hearing problem makes it difficult for people to communicate with you, What do you think he asked?

[Answer: "What failure to understand speech impediment or Makaton or sign language makes it difficult for people to understand?"]

Michael Oliver called this big idea a “tool”, or hammer. He loved the traditional song “If I had a hammer”. He said the social model as like a hammer. It worked to solve problems.

This is right. But remember, not all problems can be solved by one tool. There is a saying “Give a person a hammer, and all they see is nails”. We need different “tools” in our tool box to solve different problems. What tools do you think you need in your tool box?

Some of them are things we need to learn and get right.

Others are improvements that people need to make about communication and information. Others are improvements that people need to make about environmental barriers.

Others are changes that people need to make to attitudes.

Everyone has the same needs. But we might need different ways to meet those needs and make sure that everyone flourishes. We need lots of tools in our tool box, but we need to make sure the social model is one of those tools! Everyone needs a hammer.

Further reading

Michael Oliver (1990) *The Politics of Disablement*. This is quite a complex academic book.

Jenny Morris (1991) *Pride Against Prejudice*. This is a more accessible book, that shows how cultural attitudes play a role, and also that our own difficulties are part of the story.

Tom Shakespeare (2018) *Disability – the Basics*. This is a shorter book written for a more general audience which explains all about disability.

SOCIAL SNAKES AND LADDERS

How to play the game

First make the cards and the boards

Print them out.

Stick the cards onto cardboard, with the toolkit symbol on one side and the solutions on the other (be careful to line them up!)

Stick the board onto a cardboard backing. You might like to laminate it

You need to provide

1. A dice
2. Counters, one for each person playing the game

Instructions

The squares with pictures, show difficult situations that can happen in our lives. Before playing, go through and make sure you all agree on what these situations represent.

The toolkit cards show various ways that the problems could be solved. There might be more than one! Again, go through and make sure everyone agrees and understands them.

To play the game, use the counters and the dice to move along the board.

When you reach a picture card you can either go down the snake (if you can't think of a solution) or up a ladder (if you can use the toolkit to advance).

Discussion points

Have any of these situations happened to you? What did you do?
Does a social model help us to deal with

- a) our feelings about what is going on?
- b) knowing how to respond

Enjoy this game!

We look forward to meeting you at the workshop!

Thanks to Adelaide Peart who drew the pictures.