

ILA AGM Presentation: A Life of Campaigning

CAT-Campaign for Accessible Transport

In 1989 after graduating from University, where I had taken part in Anti-Apartheid Marches and Stop the Poll Tax Demonstrations, I moved into my first independent flat with volunteer PA support.

I had known Katherine Araniello as a friend since childhood. Katherine was a former ILA Chair & Tracey's Partner, who many of you knew and is very much missed. When I moved back to Greenwich I could see a lot more of her.

It was Katherine & two other Disabled friends- Veronica Pakenham and Kate Brown who initiated my life of Disabled People's Rights Activism by way of an invitation : "We're going to hijack a bus on Oxford Street, they proclaimed -do you want to join us?" A little confused, with a bit of a rebellious streak, beneath a mild exterior & more than a little curious I said yes!

Well, I never looked back...

When I got out in the noisy, bustling road in front of the red double decker route-master bus, stopping the traffic, along with my friends it all clicked in place: This was a public bus, we were part of the public, and we had a right to ride like everyone else!

Up to that moment I had believed it was my fault that I couldn't access buses as I couldn't climb the steps, I thought I would either need to be cured or live with exclusion and segregation from much of life.

This then was a moment of empowerment, an epiphany that I could feel emotionally, intellectually, spiritually and almost physically as I realised that an individual and even more so a group, could make a significant social change. Getting a cure for my condition was 'pie in the sky' but putting ramps and lifts on busses was well within the reach of possibility –it was not rocket science after all.

I left proudly, spirits high, one of the Oxford Street 8- members of CAT (Campaign for Accessible Transport) who had been arrested and charged that day for obstructing the high way.

The police unable to physically bundle us in their police vans in our wheelchairs-(many of them heavy powered chairs); commandeered my accessible van to ferry protesters to jail- ironically they had, in effect, high-jacked my van!

After release from the urine reeking, cold damp Belgravia Police cells, I didn't need transport home that day I was floating on air.... A week later we all received a letter to say"

charges had been dropped as it was not in the public interest to prosecute”, the Horseferry Magistrates Court was not wheelchair accessible –I rest my case! So began my Activist journey...

From then I went on to join many other Campaigns and Groups including DAN:

Muscle Power! - With Rights not Charity Campaigning;

Pissing on Pity at the Anti-Telethon Protests in 1990 & 1992;

*1993 Becoming a founder member & Organiser of DAN (Disabled Peoples Action Network)-
Campaigning for Accessible Transport /1995 DDA (The Passing of the Disability
Discrimination Act)/ Free Our People-Campaigning for disabled people to get out of
residential institutions into the community 1996*

GAD Cil (Now METRO-GAD)-Greenwich Association of Disabled People: 1989- Present

& ILA (Independent Living Alternatives)-Independent Living Rights 2015-Present

DPAC (Disabled People Against the Cuts)-Save the ILF 2014, Stop the Cuts Present

NDY-(Not Dead Yet), Disabled People’s Rights to Life

Changing Places facilities Campaigning 2012-Accessible Environments for All

Pandemic Campaigning for Provision of Home Ventilator Supplies Now!

But time does not allow so this is another story, for another time!

Thank you for listening,

Congratulations ILA on 31 years Anniversary and to all the staff, Members, Service Users and volunteers’ thank you!

Sue Elsegood

Co-Chair ILA