

Campaigns and Policy Manager for Wheels for Wellbeing, a disabled people's cycling organization who campaign for and provide access to cycling through an ethos of mobility justice, Dr. Kay Inckle's background is in social science, with research interests in intersectional and social justice approaches to mental health and disability. She has published widely in these fields including research conducted with disabled cyclists.

Dr. Kay Inckle

CAMPAIGNS AND POLICY MANAGER
FOR WHEELS FOR WELLBEING

UNITED KINGDOM

In your view, what is a feminist transport system?

A feminist transport system is one that is designed to meet the needs of a population made up of 52% women, 20% disabled people, and an increasing proportion of older people. It is thinking about that population and what their needs are for making multi-modal journeys, trip-chaining, traveling with mobility aids, with cycles, with children, with work equipment – having a transport system designed where that is the passenger norm. The current system is largely designed on the basis that all human beings are young, non-disabled, white men who make single purpose journeys in and out of the city center. A feminist transport system would be a complete re-imagining what the public actually looks like and how they travel.

How does the current situation for women and girls in the UK, particularly those with disabilities, influence your work?

We are really aware of the additional barriers that disabled women face while using all types of transport, including cost, accessibility, the general design of transport that doesn't meet the needs of either women or disabled people. There are also forgotten factors about the lives of disabled women, for example, that a large percentage of disabled women are also carers for children or other disabled people. Yet we have a transport system that is often designed to only accommodate one person with a mobility aid at a time. That prevents families, friendship groups, and disabled carers from traveling with those they need to travel with. This forces people

back into the most expensive, least affordable and least sustainable forms of transport like the private car or taxi.

How is your work helping to address these challenges?

Our specific focus is on equitable access to cycling for disabled people, but there are interconnections with active travel and public transport more broadly: accessible pavements, walking and wheeling infrastructure, the need for accessible public transport that people can take their cycles or other mobility aids on board. It connects with wider issues that disability groups are campaigning around and we lend our voice to them.

We also campaign for policies to make cycling more accessible, like, for example, the cost of a non-standard cycle. Where a nice standard bicycle may cost about GBP 500, an e-assist hand cycle or recumbent tricycle may cost between GBP 4,000–8,000. In the context of a disability pay and employment gap where disabled people are less likely to be in employment and earn less than non-disabled people that creates a double barrier to cycling. For disabled women that figure is even more stark; they are on the worst end of the disability pay and employment gap. Cycling, for disabled people, exists within these wider inequalities that are all interrelated. We can never talk about disability and cycling without the wider structural context that causes so much discrimination and disadvantage for disabled people.



What guides your advocacy and keeps you motivated?

Like many disabled activists, it is the lived experience of the contrast between what is possible and what is actually happening that motivates me. I came to cycling not as an activist but as a disabled person – cycling was the easiest way for me to get around. It has always been a form of mobility, exercise, independence, access to nature, physical and mental health for me. As a young woman who could ride a two-wheeled bicycle it also offered freedom from the ableist gaze. It gave me anonymity I had not experienced before and freedom from unwanted attention.

To stay motivated, it is important to depersonalize the barriers we encounter. As a disabled person, when I go out, I can expect to be ignored, patronized, stared at, touched inappropriately by those “trying to help.” When you live with a disability all your life, you develop quite a low bar of what you have to tolerate, so for me, becoming active through feminism and then the disability rights movement that helped me realize none of this is about me as an individual. I am not the problem. It is other people and the broader structural inequalities and barriers that are the problem. People always try to individualize the issues you experience as a woman or a disabled person, or other minoritized group. You are expected not to “make a fuss” and to accept poor standards of access and behavior and we have to keep challenging this. At the same time, a lot of what is deemed acceptable for disabled people, would not be tolerated for other minority groups. For example, we wouldn’t accept only one woman or one person of the LGBTQIA+ community to be allowed on the bus at the same time, or expect them to use a different door or to have to book the train at least two days in advance, yet this is still the norm for disabled people in the UK.

I grew up before the Disability Discrimination Act, in an environment where disabilities were shamed and hidden. Part of my life learning is to undo this, to be loud about discrimination and inequality, and look to other people who are fighting the same and parallel battles. Mine has been a life journey of moving away from internalizing oppression to now being vocal and angry and not taking nonsense from others.

Do you have a feminist role model?

There are two disabled women activists who I admire in terms of active travel and public transport. Firstly, Rosa May Billinghurst, who is known as the “cripple suffragette.” She used a mobility device that was a wheelchair-tricycle hybrid (similar to something called the Mountain Trike today) and was very active in the suffragettes. She often, used her mobility aid as part of her direct action including, bashing into barriers and causing destruction and the police would try and confiscate her tyre valves to immobilise her. It is a shame that she is not more visible when we think about the suffragettes, a disabled women right at the front of the campaign. In recent history, there is Barbara Lisicki (still living), co-founder of the Disabled People’s Direct Action Network (DAN), who used a punk-inspired sensibility in direct actions demanding accessible public transport and protesting telethon fundraisers that depicted disabled people as objects of pity.

What would you tell your younger self?

I would have liked to have been bolder when I was younger about cycling as a mobility aid for me as a disabled person and understanding that I was not alone in that. I wish I had known that even though not much existed at the time there would be much greater understanding and support in the future and to just hang in there. I would remind myself that change is slow, but to keep looking, there are other people who share your experience, it just takes a bit of work to find them.

What advice would you give others with disabilities who want to be a part of this reshaping of the transport system?

Be confident, be loud, be unapologetic. Remember that you have the right to take up space in the world and to have your voice heard and keep going until that happens.

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