

## Introduction

You can listen to a recording of this article at:

<http://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/magazine-articles/disability>

This support pack contains the following materials:

- a pre-reading vocabulary activity
- the article that you can listen to
- a comprehension activity based on the article

## Before you read

### Activity 1

Match the words and phrases at the top to their definitions.

a. bawdy	b. beg	c. breadwinner
d. burdens	e. clumsy	f. crawl
g. on the grounds that	h. ostracized	i. outcast
j. paralysed	k. prosthetic limbs	l. ramps
m. self esteem	n. stampede	o. tactile

1. artificial arms or legs
2. artificial slopes
3. ask for food or money because you are poor
4. avoided or prevented from taking part in group activities
5. awkward in movement
6. because of
7. belief and confidence in your own ability and value
8. containing humorous remarks about sex
9. difficult people you have to worry about
10. move slowly on hands and knees
11. person who earns money that their family needs
12. person who is refused a place in a society or group
13. sudden, uncontrolled movement of many people because of fear
14. touching other people a lot
15. unable to move

## Read the article

### Disability

by Chris Wilson

Nowadays in the “west” the able bodied are constantly reminded that disabled people have rights just like everyone else and they mustn’t discriminate against them in any way. Public buildings have to have ramps and toilets big enough for wheelchairs. Bus drivers are supposed to announce every stop so that blind people know when to get off. One is not allowed to refuse a person a job on the grounds that he or she has only one leg, or cannot speak. We use

phrases like “physically challenged” instead of crippled or spastic. We avoid using the word “dumb” to mean stupid - and this is not just us trying to be “politically correct”. Things like the Para Olympics have done wonders to raise people’s awareness with so many positive images and perceptions of disabled people genuinely have changed. Not that Western society doesn’t still have a long way to go, but disabled people are far less marginalised, far

more integrated than in the past when they were confined to institutions, out of sight and out of mind.

Disabled people's own self esteem has risen enormously in recent years and they have become far more assertive and insistent on their rights, and their ability to compete with everyone else. Even the words "disabled" and "handicapped" are challenged. Is a blind person disabled when he or she can function just as well as everyone else? New technology of course is making a huge difference. Instead of clumsy wooden legs, for example, new materials and designs in prosthetic limbs enable people to walk and run as fast as everyone else. High tech hearing aids exist for the deaf, as well as laser surgery for the very short sighted. Cars are adapted so that people can drive them with only one hand, or even no hands at all. Very recently a chip was inserted into the brain of a person paralysed from the neck down enabling him to move a cursor on a screen simply by looking at it. This means he can now do all sorts of things - switch the television and the lights on and off, type, surf the internet, even send e-mails. Who knows what he'll be able to do next? Drive a car?



Also many things that previously were not considered disabilities now are recognised for what they are - serious handicaps, and arrangements have been made for the people who suffer from them. Dyslexia is a good example. Not so long ago dyslexic people were considered at school to be slow, or stupid, and that was that. Nowadays it is seen as a serious condition and teachers have to be aware of it.

But what is it like in the Developing World? In places where there are no facilities at all? Where polio victims have to crawl through the traffic on their knees and elbows? Where every disabled person is unemployed and forced to beg, or depend on relatives?

"Despite all that" says Anna, a Swedish Volunteer in Mozambique, "it is often in these places that disabled people are actually more integrated and happier in society. Western society is so obsessed with beauty and physical perfection that even an overweight person feels ostracised, let alone a person missing an entire limb. Here having one leg is no more remarkable than having a big nose".

But is this really so?

"Yes and no" says Adolfo, a blind Mozambican who, as an accomplished guitar player, is actually the only breadwinner in his family. "I'm lucky. I have a skill. More importantly I was given the opportunity to acquire one. And so I am able to contribute to society and I am respected. Most disabled people are totally unskilled and so are burdens on society whether they like it or not. Maybe we are more generous, we don't reject people who cannot contribute. They are not outcasts - but that doesn't mean we respect them either. I think that is too idealistic a view of African society, how we would like it to be rather than how it really is. In reality these days, with so much poverty and HIV Aids, it's every man for himself, every woman for herself, and disabled people are completely forgotten, left behind. I heard a story about a woman in a very dry part of our country. She had lost both legs in a land mine explosion. Because of drought there was no food and when a UN truck full of supplies arrived she was left behind in the stampede, and so she got none. Later everyone had to register in order to get a ration card, then because she didn't get one she was told that she did not officially exist and therefore was not entitled to food! No thank you, I would rather have no legs in Europe any day than here".

"I don't believe that story" says Anna. "People here just wouldn't behave like that".  
 "Have you ever been really hungry?" asks Adolfo.  
 "No" she is forced to admit.  
 "Then how would you know?"

But Anna still thinks it's worse in the west. "In Africa people are much more tactile, much more tolerant, much more accepting. Even the mentally deranged are part of society. What's the use of all those facilities if no one actually ever talks to you? Disabled people in Europe are dying of loneliness. People are physically repulsed by handicapped people. The idea that disabled people have sexual desires just like anyone else is quite shocking. Here in the market there is a young girl who sells tomatoes. She must have been in an awful fire because one side of her is completely burnt and her left hand has no fingers at all. Her face is terribly disfigured, she has only one eye and just a hole for a nose. But she flirts with all the guys, and then makes bawdy jokes about them to the other women, and has everyone in fits of laughter."

"That doesn't mean they actually fancy her though" says Adolfo. "Unless they're blind like me" he jokes.

"But going back to Technology, it is making things easier here too" he adds. "Look at my mobile phone".

"Wouldn't you like a speaking clock or a computer with software to enable it to read aloud to you?" asks Anna.

Adolfo just laughs. "My wife does that for me" he says. "She reads the newspaper to me every day".

"You see!" says Anna. "That proves me right. Nobody where I come from has got time to read to a blind person! And don't tell me that a machine can do it just as well because it can't!"

### After reading

#### Activity 2

Decide if each of the questions below is True, False, or Not mentioned in the text.

1. All over the world attitudes towards disabled people have changed.
2. Bus drivers in the "west" always announce every stop so that blind people know when to get off.
3. "Spastic" is used in a derogatory way these days.
4. The Para Olympics have helped a lot to make people see disabled people more positively.
5. When disabled people were confined to institutions other people didn't think about them.
6. Disabled and handicapped mean the same thing.
7. Soon paralysed people will be able to drive cars.
8. Dyslexic people often see letters in a word the wrong way around.
9. In the past people didn't know what dyslexia was.
10. Anna thinks it is better to be disabled in the "west".
11. Adolfo's situation is different from that of most disabled people in his country.
12. According to Adolfo poverty and AIDS make people more caring towards each other.
13. The woman didn't get any food because she didn't have any legs.
14. All the boys in the market fancy the girl who sells tomatoes.
15. Adolfo's wife always tells him the time.

### Answers

**Activity 1:** 1. k; 2. l; 3. b; 4. h; 5. e; 6. g; 7. m; 8. a; 9. d; 10. f; 11. c; 12. i; 13. n; 14. o; 15. j

**Activity 2:** Not mentioned (NM); 2. NM; 3. True (T); 4. T; 5. T; 6. T; 7. NM; 8. NM; 9. T; 10. False (F); 11. T; 12. F; 13. F; 14. F; 15. NM