



Glasgow Disability Alliance
Promoting Equality, Rights and Social Justice



Manifesto 2024:

Action for Disabled
People's Equality &
Human Rights

During the pandemic, GDA's engagement with over 6000 disabled people, including 2500 online surveys, evidenced that:

- **41%** could not get accessible information in the formats they needed.
- **80%** were not aware of any local support services they could access.
- **82%** faced extreme social isolation.
- **Over 60%** were digitally disconnected.
- **83%** faced barriers to accessing support they need.
- **Over 1,884** social care packages were cut.
- **90%** were concerned about their physical and mental health.
- **Almost 50%** were worried about food and **57%** were worried about poverty, money and hardship: this has got worse with the cost of living and energy crises.
- **Over 90%** want disabled people's voices to be heard in policies, services and decisions affecting their lives. This is very much still the case as rights have regressed.

"We really need to look at what went wrong [during the pandemic] and build on what worked... We need to involve DPOs in the plans and actions that are made... and that does require investment... We really need to invest in public services, particularly health and social care... We need to build understanding of why the investment in public services is needed... We need to look at progressive taxation, and we need to build understanding of the reality of disabled people's lives, of the poverty and inequality and the kinds of solutions that are required... we need an action plan.

We need actions that embed disabled people's rights. "

Tressa Burke, CEO, Statement to Scottish Covid-19 Inquiry, 22 Nov 2023

About Glasgow Disability Alliance

GDA is a Disabled People's Organisation (DPO) controlled by our 5500+ disabled members.

GDA is the largest groundswell of disabled members in Europe and a leading and celebrated example of a grassroots community of identity driving improvements to disabled people lives and social change.

Our work is built on foundations of individual and collective community empowerment and is based on peer support, developing and drawing on disabled people's own strengths by:

- Building individual capacity through holistic learning and development, wellbeing, digital coaching and connections, support to navigate Social Care and welfare rights information, advice and representation.
- Amplifying diverse voices and perspectives of disabled people, supporting them to articulate and share lived experience and to participate in dialogue, deliberation and collective advocacy which challenges inequality and exclusion.
- Collaborating for change with local and national government, communities and the third sector, sharing insights and evidence to shape policy and co-design more accessible services and solutions to poverty, inequality and exclusion.

"It is the way that society is constructed which prevents disabled people from participating – that's why we need GDA to provide capacity building, peer support, collective advocacy and access – so we understand our rights – and make sure that our voices are heard." GDA Member

Disabled people's right to life is set out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Disabled People (UNCRPD) Article 10 – Right to life:

“States Parties reaffirm that every human being has the inherent right to life and shall take all necessary measures to ensure its effective enjoyment by persons with disabilities on an equal basis with others.”¹

This means that disabled people should be able to access their right to life, like any other non-disabled person. **But we know this is not the case and disabled people feel that our very lives are under threat.**

Disablisation, Disabling Barriers and the Social Model of Disability

Disabled People in Glasgow and Scotland have felt deprioritised and dehumanised increasingly over decades and even more so since the last General Election. Successive policies and Governments have failed to tackle our poverty and inequality and the dire situation facing disabled people has been supercharged by national policies and global events e.g. austerity, the pandemic and the cost of living crisis.

Disabled members of GDA describe feeling voiceless and powerless in their own lives. It is essential that we recognise that disabled people in themselves are a seldom heard group: this must not be taken for granted. Indeed, without GDA's intensive support and capacity building, our disabled members' voices would be heard less in democracy and in elections.

It is essential for candidates and political parties to fully understand the barriers disabled people face and the supports we need to live our lives and play our full role in families, communities and wider society.

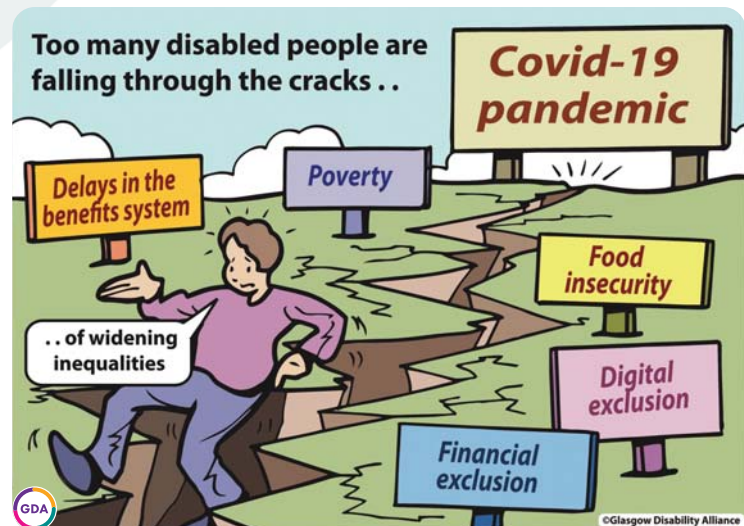
The diagram, below, illustrates the many barriers faced by disabled people, which stop us from meaningfully participating in our own lives, our families, our communities and wider society. These barriers derive from long term structural and systemic inequalities and manifest as:

- Physical and environmental barriers - buildings, housing and transport.
- Institutional barriers, such as the way policies and services are designed and delivered e.g. Health & Social Care and wider services.
- Attitudinal barriers: discrimination, stigma, low expectations and exclusion.



Disabled People's Lives: A "Human Catastrophe"

In 2017, the UN Committee on the Rights of Disabled People, described the lives of disabled people in the UK as a "human catastrophe", reflecting disabled people's poorer life outcomes across education, employment and participation itself - including in communities, families and in civic and political life.



In its **2024 Report** the UN Committee concluded that, since 2017:

*"[N]o significant progress has been made... concerning the situation of persons with disabilities... [the UK and devolved administrations] have failed to take all appropriate measures to address grave and systematic violations of the human rights of persons with disabilities and have failed to eliminate the root causes of inequality and discrimination as framed in General Comment No. 6 on equality and non-discrimination."*²

- Austerity has thrust disabled people into isolation and deep, long term poverty.
- The Pandemic supercharged inequalities, and created new ones, for disabled people, including higher numbers of deaths; lack of lifeline services; and a group of disabled people now unable to go out due to severe mental distress, authentic high risks of Covid or the impact of Long Covid.
- The Cost of Living crisis is having a gruelling toll on disabled people who were already worst off.
- Disabled people are made to feel like a burden: that we cost too much for the state and therefore should reduce dependency.

This needs to change!

It is in this context of the dehumanisation of disabled people and the regressions of our human rights that Glasgow Disability Alliance, and our 5,500 disabled members, are calling for actions! We need those standing in the 2024 UK General Election to:

Ask 1: Place disabled people at the heart of tackling poverty and inequality.

Ask 2: Invest in disabled people's employment.

Ask 3: Invest in public services which uphold disabled people's rights, advance equality and support independent living.

Ask 4: End disabled people's social isolation and maximise civic, social and political participation.

Ask 5: Strengthen and uphold disabled people's rights.

Disabled People's Poverty & Inequality

The main drivers for disabled people's poverty include the inadequate level of benefits in the UK, exclusion from the workplace and extra costs of being disabled. Low pay or insecure and part-time work means employment is often not a route out of poverty and benefits are needed to 'top-up' earnings. There is much evidence *"that benefit levels are too low, and that claimants are often not able to afford daily living costs and extra costs associated with having a health condition or disability."*³

In its 2024 report on the UK, the UN Committee on the Rights of Disabled People stipulated that there should be no changes to disability benefits that result in further regressions of human rights. This warning was issued at a time when disabled people face a higher risk of poverty and inequality after 14 years of austerity; the disproportionate impact the Covid pandemic had on us; and now the cost of living crisis.

It should shock and shame us that people living in a family with a disabled person are more likely to be in very deep poverty. **The risk of 'deep' poverty is 60% higher in families where someone is disabled than families where no one is disabled.**⁴

Cost of Living Crisis

As well as experiencing disproportionate levels of poverty, disabled people have to face additional costs. These include higher:

- **Food Costs:** e.g. food corresponding to specific dietary requirements; relying on pre-prepared meals/ingredients, take away/microwave meals if no support to cook from scratch.
- **Energy Costs:** e.g. health conditions which require the heating on even in warmer weather; charging essential equipment such as power chairs, nebulisers, ventilators, mechanical hoists and hospital beds.
- **Transport Costs:** e.g. reliance on taxis due to inaccessible public transport.
- **Social Care Costs:** e.g. Glasgow City Health and Social Care Partnership and Glasgow City Council's decision to charge up to 75% disposable income for non-residential care costs.⁵

Ask 1: Place disabled people at the heart of tackling poverty and inequality

- Co-design a Disabled People's Poverty Action Plan with DPOs.
- Create and deliver a fair and progressive tax system to reduce inequality and poverty, including introduction of a wealth tax; comprehensive reform of property taxes; measures to tax capital income at the same level as income from labour; and a crackdown on tax abuse by wealthy individuals and multinational corporations including new transparency measures.
- Stop sanctions and conditionality; end punitive approaches; and redesign the benefits system to reflect rights and an adequate standard of living and social protection, as per Art.28 of the UNCRPD.
- Halt proposed reforms to Personal Independence Payment (PIP) and Universal Credit.
- Protect and uprate disability means tested benefits to meet costs of long periods of unemployment, extra costs and costs of living.
- Increase non-means tested disability benefits, e.g. PIP, to meet the true extra costs of disability.
- Provide parity of benefit rates for people under 25 as this pushes younger people into poverty, including younger disabled people.
- Invest in, develop and sustain flexible and accessible welfare rights advice, information and representation services, such as GDA's 'Rights Now'.
- Establish schemes to provide disabled people with affordable Fuel, Energy and Broadband social tariffs and cash support for those using dialysis and other independent living equipment.
- Establish a Minimum Income Guarantee – a level beneath which no-one falls – including a Disability Premium which takes account of longer periods out of work, extra costs and less financial resilience.

"I always feel like Damocles Sword is above my head... My care contribution has increased by £42 a week. My increase with Working Tax Credit and PIP is £18.93 p/w. I already cut my budget in half because of utility bills but now I am very stressed." GDA Member

Disabled People and Barriers to Employment

As of September 2022, half of disabled working-age adults (53%) in the UK were in employment, compared with eight in ten (82%) non-disabled working-age adults.

This disability employment gap, of 29.8 percentage points, is one of the main reasons for the higher level of poverty among disabled people than non-disabled people. ⁶

Furthermore, when disabled people are in employment, they are more likely to be in part-time and poorly paid work. This means they need to rely on income-related benefits to supplement their income.



There are many reasons for the Disability Employment Gap including:

- Negative attitudes and stigma around employing disabled people still persists, with employers less likely to hire a disabled person.
- Lack of accessible workspaces.
- Lack of flexibility in hours that may be needed for people with health conditions that fluctuate.
- Protracted assessments and decision-making from Access to Work resulting in delays to support being put in place.
- Lack of knowledge, understanding or willingness to learn more about employing disabled people on the part of employers.

Ask 2: Invest in disabled people's employment

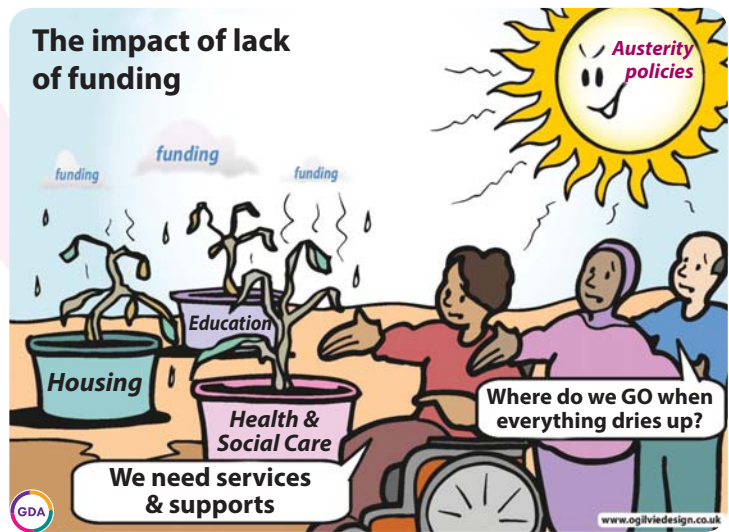
- Commit to reducing the Disability Employment Gap:
 - ✓ Provide accessible, disability focused employability support for those most distanced from the labour market.
 - ✓ Increase focus on 'employerability' i.e. supporting employers to recruit, develop, promote and retain more disabled people.
 - ✓ Increase availability of accessible childcare for disabled children and social care for disabled parents to enable access to the labour market.
 - ✓ Make Disability Equality Training mandatory for all public sector employers including UK Government and devolved administrations.
 - ✓ Recruit, develop, promote and retain more disabled workers across UK Government and devolved Governments ensuring the necessary support is in place, mirroring Access to Work principles.
- Increase investment in Access to Work:
 - ✓ Ensure responsive, accessible and dignified support in a timely manner.
 - ✓ Include disabled people who are in training for work and/or volunteering.
 - ✓ Increase employers' awareness of Access to Work.
- Enable and resource 'softer' pathways into work e.g. lifelong learning, volunteering, peer support and role models as first steps to build confidence and aspirations.

"As soon as somebody mentions that you've got a disability an employer backs away, saying this will cost a lot of money if we employ somebody like this. It's not true. Small reasonable adjustments will suit the majority of disabled people, which doesn't cost a lot of money." **GDA Member**

"I had an opportunity to get a job, but after doing the benefits check, I'd just be £3 better off each week. They should say employers need to pay a living wage so it's worth them coming off the benefits. Are you going to come off it for £3 a week extra?" **GDA Member**

Disabled People and Barriers to Services

Disabled people still face multiple barriers accessing good quality and appropriate health and social care services, including mental health provision; education; and housing. These barriers, as highlighted in the diagram on page 3 can be physical, institutional or attitudinal.



The combination of these barriers and Covid itself led to 60% of all deaths during the pandemic being disabled people.⁷

Many services have been cut or reduced due to austerity and successive governments deprioritising disabled people and neglecting to put the necessary support in place to ensure provision.

Nearly three quarters (74%) of disabled people who have accessed social services, have experienced at least some difficulties in accessing social services. This rises to 78% for disabled people who had accessed health services.⁸

Meanwhile, other services are impossible to access being based in a public environment that is not designed for disabled people and so difficult, or impossible, to negotiate.

The impact of the cost of living crisis on service provision is severe. A report by the Glasgow Centre for Population Health describes a harsh picture in which:

“The conditions created by the crisis are corrosive to mental health, particularly increasing stress levels and social isolation. The current crisis also affects physical health, worsening symptoms and compromising health conditions.”⁹

This is further evidenced by the lived experience of GDA members, for example:

“To be a disabled person – especially one needing social care support – is to live a life without choices or any sense of personal autonomy. The financial context determines whether disabled people have human rights and are even able to be in charge of our own life. We need to start from understanding of this as a fundamental injustice when planning how we might be heard or even dare to complain.” GDA Member

Ask 3: Invest in public services which uphold disabled people's rights, advance equality and support independent living

- Increase investment in social care for disabled people which meets needs and enables choices and a life of meaning.
- Scrap social care charges and increase block grants to devolved nations.
- Increase investment in more accessible health services to tackle lifelong health inequalities and improve life outcomes.
- Increase and resource accessible and responsive mental health and wellbeing services and supports for disabled people; take account of both physical and mental health conditions and intersecting barriers.
- Ensure public and preventative health policies, practice and campaigns are available and accessible to disabled people.
- Increase investment in, and establish a right to, palliative care, so people living with terminal illness receive the physical, emotional, psychological and practical support they need, to focus on living as fully as possible in the time they have left.
- Invest in building accessible, affordable social housing including setting targets for accessible, barrier free, "houses for life" for disabled people.
- Provide accessible information to disabled people about housing rights and help available with adaptation grants.
- Embed rights for disabled children and young people to access appropriate support to attend and remain in fully inclusive mainstream education.
- Invest in inclusive, accessible mainstream education and resourced, sustained community-based learning for disabled people of all ages - children, adults and older people.
- Invest in infrastructure plans and regulatory measures to ensure disabled people's inclusive access to public services, including buildings, transport, information and communication.

"No amount of cognitive therapy and thinking differently about my rotten situation is going to make my mental health better. Isolation, poverty, where I live, exclusion, discrimination and not being listened to by health professionals all impact negatively on my mental health." GDA Member

Disabled People: Social Isolation and Barriers to Participation

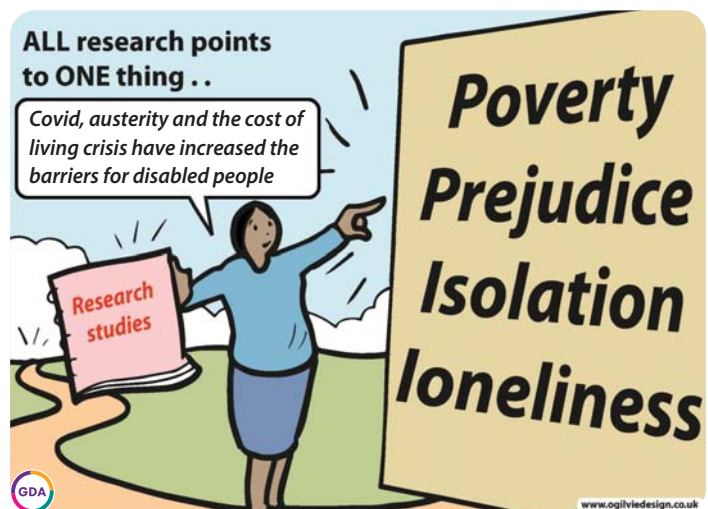
GDA's own research pre and during the Covid-19 pandemic with thousands of disabled people paints a stark picture of isolation and exclusion:

- **82%** were concerned about isolation over the past two years.
- **80%** were not able to access local support services they needed during the pandemic and lockdown – despite the tremendous efforts of local communities.
- Pre-pandemic, **71%** found it difficult to participate in their local communities, due to physical barriers, stigma, lack of accessible information.¹⁰

Disabled people report higher levels of loneliness: **15.1%** of disabled people reported feeling lonely “often or always” in 2020/21, compared with **3.6%** of non-disabled people.¹¹

Some of the barriers which prevent disabled people from making connections and participating include:

- Lack of social care support to enable people to get out, meet others and take part in activities.
- Absence of choice and control about what we do and how we do it!
- Financial constraints making socialising unaffordable, including the cost of travel.



- Physical barriers and lack of access.
- Public attitudes and lack of confidence that people will be welcoming and understanding.

Digital exclusion also creates barriers: GDA found over 60% of disabled people were digitally excluded at the start of the Covid pandemic. Research has found the causes of digital exclusion are “often structural and reflect longstanding social, economic and regional disparities. People are rarely digitally excluded for a single reason.”¹²

These barriers include lacking the equipment, connectivity or confidence to access the internet. Digital exclusion is both a cause and an effect of poverty, isolation, barriers to information and services, and barriers to accessing opportunities.

Ask 4: End disabled people's social isolation and maximise civic, social and political participation

- Invest in inclusive, holistic supports which maintain wellbeing such as community connectors; community learning and development; cultural and leisure services; and facilities and connections to information, services and opportunities.
- Reinststate access to, and provision of, public services in-person or by telephone rather than assuming digital, technical or AI solutions by default.
- Eradicate digital exclusion by introducing broadband social tariffs which are genuinely affordable.
- Create new accessibility and inclusion standards which meet disabled people's needs in relation to transport, the built environment and public realm.
- Commit to co-designing and co-producing policies, programmes, services, strategies and plans, with disabled people and DPOs: this should include accountability and oversight mechanisms.
- Provide strategic funding for DPOs to deliver individual and collective learning and development, build capacity, facilitate peer support and organise representation of voices and priorities.
- Allocate resources to ensure disabled people can meaningfully participate in civic, political and public life including democratic decision-making at all levels.
- Invest in building disability equality competence for funders to increase knowledge and skills of barriers facing disabled people and DPOs when setting funding priorities and making decisions impacting on DPOs e.g. the need for Access Facilitation Disregard when assessing and comparing funding levels/affordability.^a

^a Access Facilitation Disregard means to overlook the additional costs that need to be built into funding applications to enable disabled people's participation. The need to budget for e.g. accessible transport; PA support; providing resources in various formats; and hiring accessible venues means applications from DPOs appear, on the surface, to be much more costly and provide poor value for money when grant decisions are being made.

Disabled People and Rights Regressions

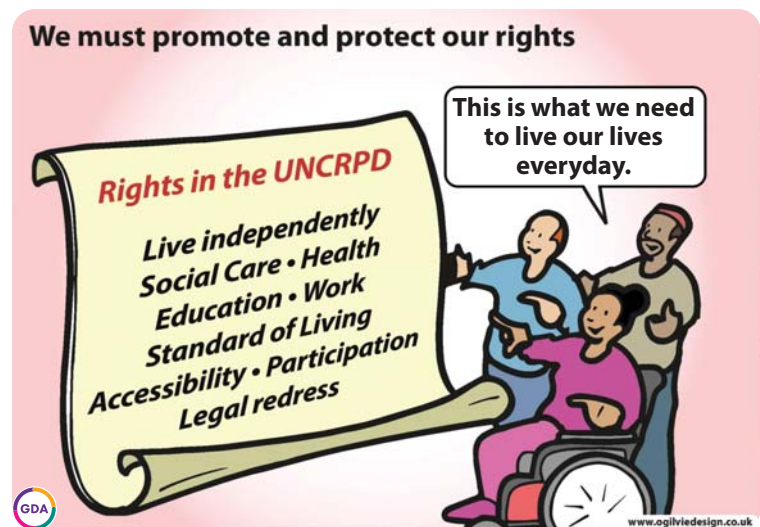
Elections are one means in a democracy through which people can have their say. However, there was a 'disability voting gap' of 6.2% across UK General Elections between 2010 and 2019.¹³

Disabled people report having a lack of influence and representation in the political and public sphere and have lower "democratic wellbeing"^b scores than non-disabled people:

- Disabled people are more likely to report low levels of trust in all levels of Government than non-disabled people.
- Disabled people are more likely than non-disabled people to disagree that they can influence decisions affecting the UK as a whole or at their local level.¹⁴

Given this, it is vital that disabled people's rights are strengthened and upheld through the most robust legal protection available. The clearest way to do this is to incorporate the UNCRPD into UK law with a duty to comply with the rights contained in the Convention for all public bodies.

Disabled people's access to justice and remedies must also be strengthened. This requires thinking creatively about how to empower disabled people to seek legal redress where their rights have been violated: DPOs have a role in supporting such actions e.g. telling disabled people their rights.



It is disturbing that during a cost of living crisis and financial challenges affecting services such as health and social care, time and energy is being spent in all parts of the UK debating or introducing assisted dying bills. Given the inequalities and discrimination disabled people face, there are no proposed safeguards strong enough to alleviate disabled people's fears that they could be seen as a burden and dispensable. This anxiety is exacerbated by the ready use of Do Not Resuscitate Orders on disabled people during the Covid pandemic, often in cases where they were inappropriate and unjustified.

^b 'Democratic wellbeing' includes participation, trust in key institutions and ability to influence decisions at a national and local level.

Ask 5: Strengthen and uphold disabled people's rights

- Incorporate the UNCRPD into UK domestic law and invest in DPOs to monitor implementation.
- Retain and strengthen the Human Rights Act.
- Strengthen the Public Sector Equality duty at the UK level.
- Strengthen Disability Equality Competence across all public bodies.
- Legislate for disabled people's rights to Independent Living, as per the UN definition.
- Oppose all proposals to legislate for assisted dying.
- Provide strategic funding to support the network of DPOs across all devolved administrations to inform disabled people about rights; build capacity to understand these rights; and support them to advocate for and claim rights.
- Legislate to allow organisations, such as DPOs, access to legal aid to take discrimination cases on behalf of individual disabled people or to lead in class action litigation where disabled people as a group are being discriminated against.
- Pilot a year-long study into the impact of providing non-means tested legal aid for all discrimination cases.
- Provide financial support to disabled candidates standing for elections to meet extra costs of disability.

"Having rights is only any good if you have somewhere to go when the rights are undermined. Complaints don't seem to be enough at this point – it has got that bad that they need to be told it is unlawful to treat disabled people this way." GDA Member



If you have a question about anything in this Manifesto, come and ask us.

We work daily with disabled people at the grassroots and the sharp end of poverty and inequality.

They can tell you about the barriers they experience to Equality and Human Rights and how to remove these barriers.

Delivering Equality and Human Rights can save money as well as improve services and lives.

Please commit to this manifesto.

Sign up to take ACTION for Disabled People's Equality & Human Rights.

Thank you for your support!

Ask 1: Place disabled people at the heart of tackling poverty and inequality.

Ask 2: Invest in disabled people's employment.

Ask 3: Invest in public services which uphold disabled people's rights, advance equality and support independent living.

Ask 4: End disabled people's social isolation and maximise civic, social and political participation.

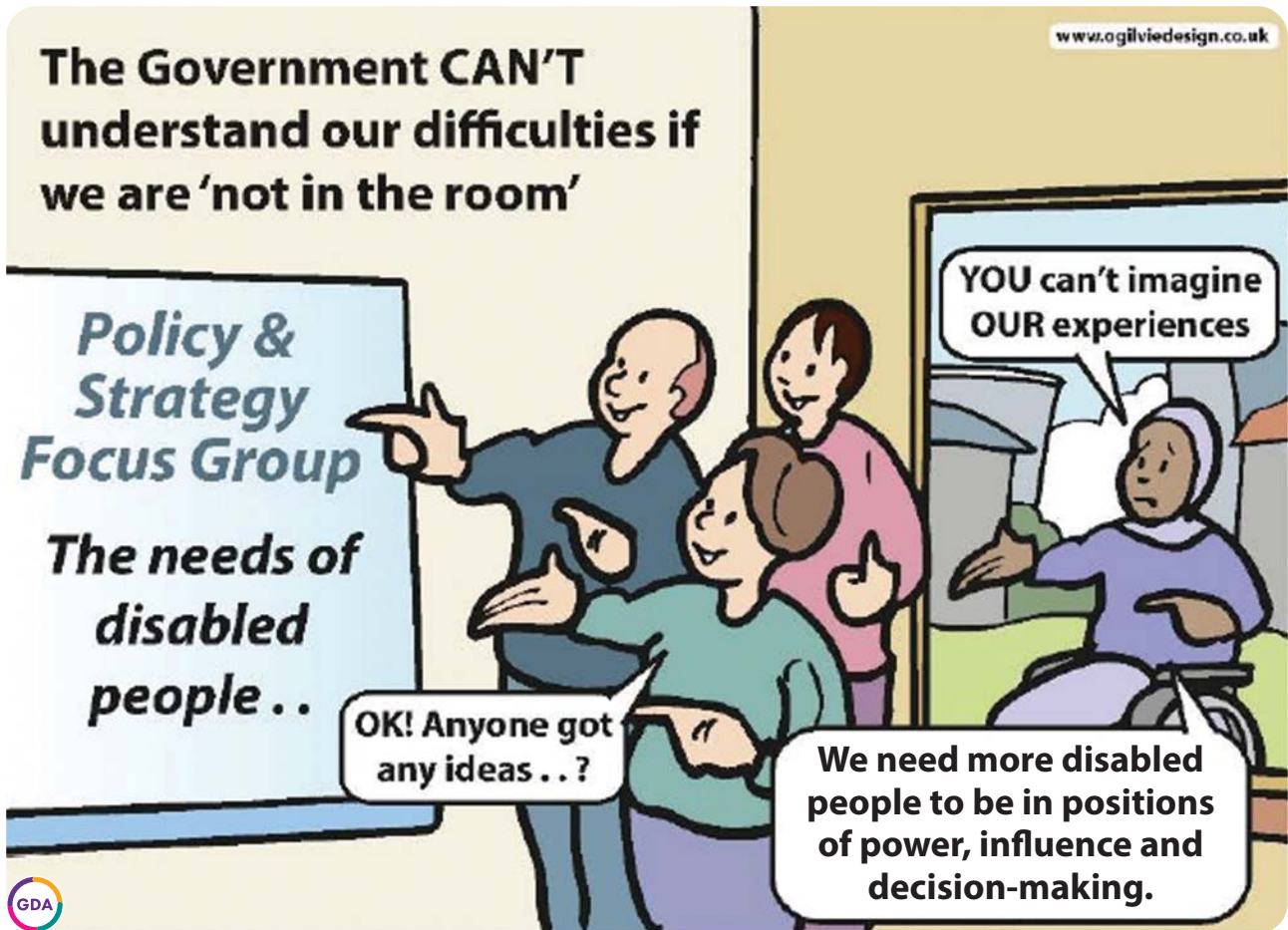
Ask 5: Strengthen and uphold disabled people's rights.

“What is community? It is a sense of belonging and I can't think of anywhere better than GDA that sums that up. I am so proud to say GDA is my community. So many other places have failed us and let us down. GDA has provided practical support, peer support and skill building. We have a voice and we can talk about the things that matter, working together for change.” GDA Member

GDA is not just about fighting for rights . .



- ¹ UN General Assembly, Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, A/RES/61/106, 24 January 2007, Art.10.
- ² Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Report on follow-up to the inquiry concerning the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, CRPD/C/GBR/FUIR/1, 22 March 2024, p13.
- ³ House of Commons Work and Pensions Committee, *Benefit levels in the UK, Second Report of Session 2023–24*, p.5.
- ⁴ Joseph Rowntree Foundation, *From Disability to Destitution*, 2022, available at: <https://www.jrf.org.uk/deep-poverty-and-destitution/from-disability-to-destitution>.
- ⁵ Glasgow City Administration Committee Minute, 23rd March 2023, <https://onlineservices.glasgow.gov.uk/councillorsandcommittees/viewDoc.asp?c=P62AFQDNZ30GZL81Z3>
- ⁶ Joseph Rowntree Foundation, *UK Poverty, The Essential Guide to Understanding Poverty in the UK*, 2024, p.69.
- ⁷ Office of National Statistics, *Updated estimates of coronavirus (COVID-19) related deaths by disability status dataset*, March 2022.
- ⁸ UK Government Disability Unit, *Public services: National Disability Strategy Explained*, July 2021.
- ⁹ Glasgow Centre for Public Health, *The Impacts of the Cost-of-Living Crisis on Disabled People: A Case for Action*, 2023, p.4.
- ¹⁰ Glasgow Disability Alliance, *Supercharged: A Human Catastrophe - Inequalities, Participation and Human Rights before, during and beyond COVID19*, 2020, passim.
- ¹¹ House of Commons Research Briefing, *UK Disability Statistics: Prevalence and Life Experiences*, 2023, p.26.
- ¹² House of Lords, Communications and Digital Committee, *Digital Exclusion*, 2023, p.14.
- ¹³ Brown, S. & Jones, M., *Understanding the disability voting gap in the UK*, *Electoral Studies* 85, 2023, p.2.
- ¹⁴ Peachey, J. and Wallace, J., *Life in the UK: Focus on Disability*, Carnegie UK, 2023, pp.12-13.



Glasgow Disability Alliance
Promoting Equality, Rights and Social Justice

Suite 301 • The White Studios • Building 4 • Templeton Business Centre
Templeton Court • Glasgow G40 1DA
Tel: 0141 556 7103 • Email: info@gdaonline.co.uk



GDA Facebook



@GDA__online



@GDA__online

www.gda.scot

contact
SCOTLAND
BSL



Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba
gov.scot



COMMUNITY
FUND



OSCR Registered
Charity
SC034247
Scottish Charity Regulator
www.oscr.org.uk



Glasgow Disability Alliance is a registered Scottish Charity number: SC034247
Company number: SC248467