


Disability Voices

**Understanding the lives of people
with disabilities in Westmorland and
Furness – 2023**





Healthwatch Cumberland and Healthwatch Westmorland and Furness would like to thank the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority who have generously funded this project.

Their support has enabled us to carry out this vital work on behalf our local communities and we are incredibly grateful.



Introduction



This is the easy read report.



You can get a copy of the full report from info@healthwestfurn.co.uk or phone 0300 373 2820.



This **Easy Read Report** has been made by the team at **Skills for People**. They employ people with learning disabilities.



A team of people from the University of Cumbria, called the Health and Society Exchange (HASKE) wrote the report.



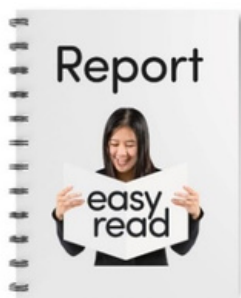
About this report



In 2023 Healthwatch collected the views of people with a disability across **Cumbria**, and their families and other people who support people with disabilities.



People gave their views in interviews, group meetings, on Facebook, and through surveys.



758 people gave their views. 147 of these people live in **Westmorland and Furness**. This report tells you what they found out.

healthwatch



Healthwatch makes sure that people who run health and care services listen to people who use them, to make services better.





“Exhaustion is constant and made worse by the poor infrastructure in the locality.

Public transport is simply not accessible.”

Survey respondent



People with disabilities told us about their lives



They told us:

- Everyone is different.
- Our lives are different.
- We like different things.



Some people with a disability need support from their family, friends or paid carers.



One in five people with a disability said they need a lot of support.



Carers told us how they support people with disabilities



Carers help people get washed and dressed.
Carers help with cleaning and cooking.



Carers support people to go out and about.
Carers help people in getting to places such as cafés.



Carers help support with medication.



People with disabilities told us what makes a good life



They told us getting the bus to the shops, having a coffee and time for friends and fun is important.



Friends and family, time with my girlfriend.



Hobbies: Getting out with my cycling club.



Having a job.





“Needing to plan everything in advance around treatments or being extra cautious due to Covid – as someone with a lung disease I am still at extra risk. Just having to do a risk assessment before I do anything takes the spontaneity out of life.”

Case study participant



People with disabilities told us what makes a good life



Feeling safe at home.



Managing my finances.



Good transport.





**'I want to live the same "good life" as anyone else does!
Working, shopping, going out with my cycling club,
attending my weekly Italian class, spending quality time
with my girlfriend and family, visiting friends, the
occasional holiday.'**

Survey respondent



People with disabilities said these things affect them



Pain.



Exhaustion – made worse by dealing with getting around in a wheelchair.



Difficulty in planning things.



Not enough public toilets.

“Sometimes I need to go quickly.”



They told us what stops them having a good life



Lots of people said their life was worse than five years ago.



Since Covid it can be hard to get out and about. Some support services and charities have closed.



The cost of living means people cannot afford to live as they want.



People feel more isolated and less confident since Covid. There is not enough support for people caring for their family.



Loneliness



Almost all people told us they feel lonely sometimes. Nearly half feel lonely often.



Nearly everyone feels that they have fewer chances to be part of their community than other people.



People feel very tired. This makes it hard for them to get out with other people.



Some people feel safer meeting people online. Having good internet access can be difficult for people who live in the countryside.





“Barrow isn't designed for wheelchair users. It's been a hell of a lesson for me. So, if in a wheelchair there's not as much opportunity for disabled people in this area.”

Case study participant



These problems affect our mental health



The problems people have made them feel worried and anxious, or depressed.



People get more anxious because they are isolated.



People are very worried about bills and paying for food.
“Will I still get the money I need to live?”



Carers worry about the future of the people they care for.





“The biggest challenges are social attitudes, employment opportunities as well as government policy. Society needs to embrace the social model of disability and reject the medical model.”

Survey respondent



People said some things have got better

People said their lives had got better in the last 5 years.



Getting out with friends after Covid.



Moving to Cumbria from a city.
Living in my own flat.



Going to a special school.



Feeling better after treatment
or an operation.





“I am frustrated over losing independence. Independence is so valuable; I hate feeling dependent on anyone. When it's forced on you, it's so dispiriting.”

Case study participant



Being held back: From having a good life

Most people told us they are held back from having a good life.



People told us:

Many places make it difficult to get around.

- No wheelchair access.
- No ramps or lifts.
- Uneven pavements and kerbs.



No accessible toilets and few have hoists.



About public transport they told us :

- Poor service which does not meet our needs.
- Very few buses in rural areas.
- It is harder to get a bus pass these days.
- Often people cannot afford a taxi service.



Being held back: Getting health and care



People told us:
It is difficult to get an appointment with the doctor.



At the dentist and doctors, the waiting rooms are noisy, and sometimes we have to wait longer than planned.



Booking appointments over the phone or by computer can be too difficult.



People had long waits for hospitals appointments. Up to three years for a wheelchair assessment. Waiting years for an autism assessment.



Being held back: Getting health and care



In Cumbria, there is a lack of specialist services.

Neurology



This means people have to travel a long way to get treatment.

This takes time and costs money.



There are not enough paid carers in rural areas.

There is not enough support for carers.



People need support with anxiety and depression before it gets too bad.



Being held back: Money to live on



People told us:
It is difficult to claim money like Personal Independence Payment (PIP) or Attendance Allowance.



The forms are long.
The questions are difficult.



It makes people anxious.
People do not get the money they could have.



Delays in getting a diagnosis means people cannot make a claim.



Being held back: Technology



Sometimes the internet is not good in the countryside.



It can make it harder to know what help is available.
It can be harder to make appointments with a doctor.





“...leisure activities are now deemed a luxury due to the cost-of-living crisis, but the consequence is that people living with mental health issues are less social/active...”

Focus group participant



Being held back: What others think

People with disabilities said that other people often do not treat them well.



People told us:

- We feel misunderstood.
- People treat people with learning difficulties as if they are stupid.
- People do not understand the barriers that people with disabilities face.
- Some employers do not understand how autism might affect a person.
- Some employers are great at taking steps so a person can do their job.



Being held back: Information



Some people said they do not get information about their health or disability.



Often people do not know what help they can get; like money for support and equipment at work, free car tax or a support dog.



The things are important to help us have a good life.





Living in Westmorland and Furness

More than half the people said that Westmorland and Furness is a good place for people with a disability to live. There are things that could be better.



We asked people what would improve their life the most



People told us:
A better social life.



Easier to get health
services and support.



Better public transport.



More chances for a good
education.
More chances to have a
job.



We asked people what would improve their life the most



People to be taught about disabled people



Make it easier to get about, especially in old towns and buildings.



We need more information about what help is available. In different formats - not just online.





“Due to the isolation, I have found that I am overthinking, and my anxiety did increase. It has impacted my personal life significantly and made me aware of how important my health/mobility is.”

Case study participant



What should happen in the future?

We used what people said to come up with a list of things that would help.



1. Involve people with disabilities.

This is the most important thing people said.

People need to be included whenever people are making decisions.



2. Think about people.

Everyone should think about how we make Cumbria better for people and their families.



3. Make it easier to get around.

Better pavements, steps, wheelchair access, public toilets and changing places, parking spaces and driving lessons.



What should happen in the future?



4. Make public transport better.

This means more public transport, better transport on evenings and at weekends, and make bus passes free all day.

Transport needs to be better for wheelchair users, and staff on public transport need to be trained better.



5. Make organisations better.

This means organisations need to make things easier for people to get the help they need.

This includes things like information, forms, appointments and buildings. It also means more help and more services.



What should happen in the future?



6. Change what people think about people with disabilities.

This means we need to tell people about the lives of people with a disability so they understand them and their needs better.

This includes training for health, care and education staff, disability awareness, and workshops for school children.



7. Communicate better.

This means better information for people with disabilities.



More ways to tell disabled people about services and things that can help them.



What should happen in the future?



8. Make sure technology does not get in the way.

This means making sure that people can get information, get help from services and have their say in ways that work for them. This includes using paper, speaking to someone, and getting help to use computers or phones.



9. Other things.

There are lots of other things that can be done to make the lives of people better.

This includes more money, better plans, and more opportunities for people.





“We need a more inclusive society as a whole. Not just those services directly working with people with disabilities but also 'mainstream' businesses and areas...”

Survey respondent



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