Greater Manchester

GM = EqAl

Equality Alliance

Inclusive Language Subgroup

Disability

The Social Model of Disabilty

- GM=EqAl endorses the **Social Model of Disability**.

- The Social Model says that people are disabled by barriers in society, not by their impairment or difference.

- The Social Model also states that society is responsible for removing the barriers disabled people face, in order to enable disabled people to be an equal, included and valued part of society.

- GM=EqAl will use therefore the term 'disabled people', which refers to the Social Model understanding that people are disabled by society.

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Social Model: Barriers

- The Social Model identifies barriers in society as preventing disabled people from living fully inclusive, equal lives.

- Some examples of these barriers include:
  - physical environment (e.g. buildings not having accessible toilets)
  - people's attitudes
  - the way people communicate
  - how institutions and organisations are run, and
  - how society discriminates against those perceived as 'different'

Social model Language

Language is an important part of the Social Model of Disability because language reflects the cultural assumptions and thinking of the society around us.

Impairment and Disability: Under the Social Model, impairment and disability are not the same:

- **Impairment**

is when part of a person's body, mind and/or emotions works differently (or is perceived to be different) from what is considered 'normal' by society.

- **Disability**

refers to the barriers, discrimination and prejudice disabled people face. It is not our bodies or minds which 'disable' us, it is society.

Disabled people as individuals

- Disabled people are often described in ways that reflect a negative or medical view of disability.

- Social Model language replaces negative, medicalised language with language that recognises disabled people as human beings. Some examples include:
  - ➢ 'disabled person' (not 'handicapped')
  - ➢ 'wheelchair user' (not 'wheelchair bound')
  - ➢ Experiencing (not 'suffering from')
  - ➢ Non-disabled person (not abled bodied)

- Calling someone 'inspirational' is not offensive in itself but when used to describe a disabled person simply for existing, it can be perceived as insulting.

Intersectionality

- Being disabled is not the only aspect of a person's identity. The way life as a disabled person is experienced also depends on a person's gender, sexuality, race, culture and age – as well as the age at which they become disabled.

- Different cultures have different understandings of disability, and certain beliefs e.g. faith beliefs that impairment is a punishment from God, can have a profound impact on disabled people in such communities.

- In cultures, and individual families, where there is shame or stigma attached to disability, parents may be reluctant to pursue a diagnosis or seek medical help.

- It is important to ensure that there is culturally competent practice, including peer mentorship, to support young disabled people growing up in such environments.

Covid-19 and language

- The term 'vulnerable' has been used excessively during the pandemic to refer to people at higher risk from Covid-19 or other factors.

- Disabled people are not inherently vulnerable; rather they are put in situations which generate and cause risk.

- Rather than vulnerable, disabled people should described as 'at higher risk' in given situations.

Special Educational Needs & Disability (SEND)

- GM=EqAl recognises the use of the word 'special' is harmful, and that inclusion should be for all, so that 'special' provision is not necessary.

- With regard to children and young people, GM=EqAl will use **young disabled people** instead of children with SEND. The term young disabled people follows the Social Model.

- When referring to SEN provision, GM=EqAl will use 'specific' educational needs rather than 'special' educational needs.

References

1. https://ukdhm.org/what-is-ukdhm/the-social-model/

2. https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities.html

3. https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/advice-and-guidance/your-rights-under-equality-act-2010

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