

<http://differentefl.blogspot.gr/2014/07/disabled-access-friendly-truly.html>

Disabled Access Friendly: a truly exceptional side of ELT



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Recently awarded the ELTON award, Disabled Access Friendly have won the hearts of the ELT world with their initiative. Katie Quartano and Paul Shaw talk about DAF, their vision and how readers can help spread the word.

"That's what really matters, not winning an award, but having done something positive that just might one day help make life better for people with mobility disability."

What is Disabled Access Friendly?

Disabled Access Friendly (www.disabled-accessfriendly.com) is a volunteer campaign that provides English language teachers (ELT) with a large bank of free, downloadable, lessons plans (http://www.disabled-accessfriendly.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=181&Itemid=1680), covering all learner levels and age ranges in a wide variety of forms. These resources are unique because besides focusing on linguistic aims, thematically, they focus on raising awareness about mobility disability.

Teachers, as true educators, can supplement a syllabus by using these resources to provide insight and information and thus build pathways for caring and action. This innovative approach of embracing social improvement through ELT addresses a difficult reality and leads to the development of critical thinking skills while stimulating learners' exploration of their own and others' attitudes towards disability.

When did you first start?

The idea to create a campaign which would use ELT to raise awareness about mobility disability issues began with the article "A day in the life of a disabled person" (http://www.disabledaccessfriendly.com/pdf_daf/PS%20A%20day%20in%20the%20li

fe%20of%20a%20disabled%20person.pdf) published in December 2009 by an Athens based English language newspaper. This article, written by Paul Shaw was a very personal account touching on both his positive and negative experiences of being a wheelchair user living in Thessaloniki, N. Greece, provoked a tremendous response from ELT colleagues in Greece.



Photo by David Lake Photography ©

As a first step Shaw started a Facebook page called "Greek Disabled Access Friendly" with the idea of raising awareness about mobility disability. The page very quickly got a huge following and Shaw began to consider how to take this initiative further. At this early stage in 2010 he was joined in his efforts by Katie Quartano and also for a while by Luke Prodromou.

The Disabled Access Friendly team began to network and promote its aims very intensively in Greece. The team also contacted key figures in EFL to ask them if they could promote the campaign through their own networks and at EFL events worldwide. The campaign called these people "ambassadors" and Lindsay Clandfield, Jeffrey Doonan, Jamie Keddie, Aleksandra Strahinic and Julia Tanner were amongst the first to offer their invaluable support. They have subsequently been joined by Hassan Ait Mane, Julia Aliverti, Ben Goldstein, Gerard McLoughlin, Waleed Nureldeen and Sue Lyon-Jones amongst others.

The campaign's website, which is the outcome of DAF's work, was launched in December 2011 (www.disabled-accessfriendly.com). In the first month alone the site had 869 visitors and 4,272 page hits.

Why was it awarded an ELTON?

The three main qualities that the judges look for in applications to the ELTons (<http://englishagenda.britishcouncil.org/eltons>) are innovation, effectiveness and practicality:



Photo by David Lake Photography ©

Innovation

The Disabled Access Friendly campaign uses a new and innovative approach, where all the resources (worksheets, reading texts and video clips) are on a **single** topic, and the overlying aim is to raise awareness about mobility disability. This is done **through** teaching or practising English. Traditional ELT resource banks provide material on a wide range of different topics, which are usually categorised by topic, level, skill and function. The online material of the Disabled Access Friendly campaign avoids addressing the topic of mobility disability head on, but rather goes through the “back door”, lowering the students’ filters’ by firstly appealing to them on another level. A unique feature of this resource bank is that professional ELT writers have come together to voluntarily contribute specially designed materials. The only goal is to use ELT to put something good back into the world. No one is making any money and no one is promoting their own name, career or product. This innovative approach of using ELT to raise awareness about a particular social issue, in this case mobility disability, could easily be applied to other issues too.

Practical

All the material is free for download from a site where no registration process is required. It is printable and, depending on teachers’ needs, can be used as supplementary material in the classroom or on a one-to-one basis, for examination practice and project or group work. The worksheets come with teacher’s notes and a key. The worksheets and reading texts are easy to browse. They are categorized by level and key information on grammar, vocabulary, functions and skills, can all be seen at a glance. Any video clips used can be played off-line in the classroom. The worksheets are easy to implement and preparation time and materials needed are kept to a minimum. Teachers will not have to spend precious time researching mobility disability or finding and preparing suitable material, as they can find everything ready-made on one site.



ELTONS acceptance speech (Photo by David Lake Photography ©)

Effective

When ELT is used for social improvement, teachers become true educators. Education is not just about acquiring skills and academic knowledge; it embraces respect for others, the promotion of well-being, fairness and equality. When teaching material enables a teacher to draw attention to something socially meaningful, and deal with topics more substantial than holidays, pets and sports, the teacher can make lessons truly worthwhile. The teacher will be using the ELT classroom to change the world for the better. They will thus be motivated and their enthusiasm and commitment will lead to better teaching.

When ELT material helps students to gain an awareness of the world in which they live and encourages them to take responsibility, think and question what they see and hear, they are motivated. Motivated students actively seek the language and vocabulary they need to be able to express themselves. This makes for an enriching learning experience and students will feel they have learned something more than just a foreign/second language

Where can teachers find materials?

All the teaching material can be downloaded for free from the Disabled Access Friendly site(http://www.disabled-accessfriendly.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=181&Itemid=1680). No registration process is required. It is printable and, depending on teachers' needs, can be used as supplementary material in the classroom or on a one-to-one basis, for projects, examination practice or group work.

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How can YOU contribute with material?

You could contribute a simple idea, suggestion, worksheet or a full lesson-plan with activities. We welcome any kind of contribution from teachers or other interested persons - you do not have to be a materials writer to contribute. We can all make use of our teaching or life experience to suggest ideas for a lesson or a particular text that could be used. You can send in an idea, an outline, or material which you think would make a good lesson at any level and for any age group. Every little bit helps. If necessary, we could then develop your idea into a more fully-fledged lesson or worksheet.

For more details please see Authors' Guidelines (http://www.disabled-accessfriendly.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=102&Itemid=236).

How can people support the Disabled Access Friendly campaign?

There are many ways you can support us:

Spread the word

- Show your colleagues the Disabled Access Friendly website
- Share teaching material you use from the site with your colleagues
 - Share our leaflet (http://www.disabled-accessfriendly.com/pdf_daf/Disabled%20Access%20Friendly%20campaign%20leaflet%20Sep%202012.pdf)
- Suggest to your colleagues that they join us on Facebook and Twitter
- Post information about the campaign on your own Facebook wall and Tweet about us
- Post information about the campaign on relevant sites and blogs
- Suggest to your colleagues that they e-mail us so we can add them to our mailing list
- Inform us of forthcoming events where we could distribute information
 - Download, print and display our poster (http://www.disabled-accessfriendly.com/pdf_daf/poster%2070x100.pdf)
 - Add our banner to your blog. We have a square banner (<http://www.disabled-accessfriendly.com/images/banners/Squarebanner.png>) and a rectangular banner (<http://www.disabled-accessfriendly.com/images/banners/Rectbanner.png>). You can download these from our site.

Become an ambassador

If you are attending an ELT event, either as a participant or as a speaker, you could consider helping to spread the word by:

- Distributing leaflets or making these available at the event
- Putting up a poster
- Talking to colleagues about the campaign
- Giving a short presentation

Before doing any of these activities you should contact the event organisers and you should contact us first. We can provide material, posters and slides for a power point presentation.

Involve student teachers

If you are a teacher trainer you might be able to get student teachers involved. Student teachers could write a lesson or worksheet that helps raise awareness, with the incentive that perhaps it will be uploaded to the Disabled Access Friendly site and used by teachers globally.

Support us in kind

Contribute your expertise (e.g. IT, design)

Contribute to the running of the campaign (stationery, printing)

Sponsor our attendance at EFL events

How do you feel now?

Proud that with our team of ambassadors and volunteers we have reached thousands of teachers and thousands upon thousands of students in over 100 countries worldwide from China to Venezuela. In 2013 19,000 individual teachers visited our site, and if you estimate

how many students each teacher might have and do the Maths, you will get lost in the number of noughts.

Proud that at a time when Greece was getting a lot of negative publicity, the Disabled Access Friendly campaign took Thessaloniki and Greece out into the world in a very favourable light.

Proud that along the way we have made a lot of good friendships.

Proud too that this campaign has brought people together at a different level, where they just voluntarily given of their kindness and goodness without receiving anything back for themselves in a commercial sense.

What is the day after (the ELTON award) like for DAF?

The day after the ELTons award felt like winning an Olympic Gold, like winning an Oscar, like nothing we have felt before. However, winning an award was never a goal for us, it just kind of happened on its own.

Being given this award for innovation in teacher resources is a great honour. We certainly had teachers very much in mind when we developed the Disabled Access Friendly campaign. We wanted to help teachers have easy and free access to meaningful material that, as well as fulfilling linguistic needs, would allow them to explore a sensitive social issue in the classroom.

Also we wanted to help students develop their emotional intelligence and have them leave the classroom feeling they had learned something of real value and something more than just English.

But actually the people we were really interested in helping were not primarily those in the classroom. Our campaign's main aim was to raise awareness about issues faced by people with mobility disability, such as problems with the physical environment, issues of behavior, inclusion, preconceptions, prejudices and stereotypes.

And that's what really matters, not winning an award, but having done something positive that just might one day help make life better for people with mobility disability.

What are DAF's future plans?

We don't really have a game plan other than to reach more teachers and more students, particularly in areas of the world where we have not been able to make great inroads yet such as the Middle East. We would like to be able to take advantage of technology to provide webinars to reach the far corners of the world, to reach teachers that can't attend conferences and subscribe to ELT publications. We would like to welcome more ambassadors to our team – people who are already active in ELT who would be willing and able to promote our work through their own networks in parallel with their own work.

But what would be really nice is to think that maybe one day, someone else with an interest in raising awareness about a different social or global issue, might like to develop a similar bank of teaching resources along the lines of the Disabled Access Friendly campaign.

Would you like to add a final comment?

Lots of us have made a good living out of ELT over the years, and this campaign has made it possible not only for us but for others too to use ELT to put something back into the world. Many colleagues have invested their humanity in this campaign by supporting us in various ways and always on a completely voluntary basis. There are so many kind people we need to thank, and we certainly wouldn't have had the same success without them. But the list is too long to even attempt, so this is a thank you to everyone who has been involved in this campaign.

Paul Shaw has been involved in the field of ELT for over 20 years. Based in Thessaloniki, Greece, he has worked as a teacher, teacher trainer, academic advisor and examiner. He has also been a project manager and editor for International ELT publishers. He was Chair of TESOL Macedonia-Thrace, Northern Greece for two terms. Shaw is a founder member of the Disabled Access Friendly campaign, where his personal experience as a wheelchair user has added an invaluable dimension to the initiative. In his free time he enjoys reading and listening to classical music.



Katie Quartano qualified in Business Studies in the U.K., and has also lived in Canada, France, the USA and Switzerland. Now permanently based in Thessaloniki, Greece, she worked for 13 years for Swissair and Austrian Airlines and is currently employed by the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki in an administrative capacity. She is also on the university's Committee for Social Policy and Health. In parallel she is a qualified EFL teacher and works as an oral examiner. She is a founding member of the Disabled Access Friendly campaign. In her free time she enjoys ballet, reading and music.

