

# DISABLED ACCESS FRIENDLY CAMPAIGN

[www.disabled-accessfriendly.com](http://www.disabled-accessfriendly.com)

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Using ELT to raise awareness about issues affecting people with mobility disability.

The campaign's website provides free EFL teaching material and graded reading texts for skills building, projects or examination practice.

This material also stimulates students to put themselves in the shoes of someone with a mobility disability for a better understanding of their needs and feelings.

The best schools and teachers have always done more than just prepare students for tests. They raise awareness of the world in which we live and try to make it a better place.

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The voluntary Disabled Access Friendly campaign was launched in January 2010 in Thessaloniki by a small team of volunteers. Within a very short period of time it has grown to become an initiative with worldwide impact. Its success is due to the fact that it is an innovative idea that offers something useful and worthwhile; it maintains high professional standards and everyone on board has worked really hard. We are proud that something so small from Thessaloniki has reached out so far and is leaving a mark on the world. We are also proud that groups within our own community support us in our work, and we would like to thank IVOG most sincerely for their confidence and belief in us and for the support they have given us this year.

The campaign aims to increase awareness about mobility disability among students learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and to persuade them that through their own actions they have the ability to bring about change. It paves the way to progress being made both in attitude and infrastructure so that people with mobility disability are less isolated, have improved access to the world, and are empowered to live more independent lives. People with mobility issues are disabled more by inaccessible infrastructure and other people's attitudes and behaviour than they are by their own physical situation. Largely through omission and ignorance they are isolated, disempowered and excluded from actively participating in everyday activities.

Teachers are in a prime position to enlighten the younger generation. Nelson Mandela said "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world" and the teaching of EFL can be a powerful and important vehicle for raising awareness about social issues. However within the confines of the syllabus, the course book and the exams it can sometimes be difficult to find appropriate material that allows teachers to do this. This is where the Disabled Access Friendly campaign identified an opportunity, and in December 2011 it launched a website ([www.disabled-accessfriendly.com](http://www.disabled-accessfriendly.com)) with free EFL teaching resources

This specially designed material helps teachers to develop students' social conscience, make lessons meaningful, and encourage critical thinking through a curriculum of social empathy. The resources consist of lesson plans and graded reading texts at all levels, which can be used as supplementary material, for project work and examination practice. The material provides students with the information necessary to allow them to put themselves in the shoes of someone with a mobility disability and stimulates them to explore how others feel and to understand others. To understand better how this can work, let us look at a few examples.

A lesson on 'can/can't' at young learners' level uses the familiar pattern of whether Helen can or can't play various sports or do various activities. The only difference here is that Helen is a wheelchair user. Helen can do lots of challenging activities:

*She can play basketball.*

*She can play tennis.*

After all these activities when Helen would like to chill out with her friend Jenny at Jenny's house:

*Helen can't go to Jenny's house.*

The picture shows that Jenny's house has steps. The lesson has prompted students to think about how infrastructure can exclude someone with a mobility disability. This issue has evolved naturally from the text, has not been presented in an aggressive or upsetting way, and at the same time the basic learning goals of the lesson in terms of language development have been achieved.

At a pre-intermediate level an illustration of a kitchen effectively practices the second conditional, whilst at the same time prompts students to think about the countless difficulties faced by wheelchair users, which go way beyond just being unable to negotiate steps. The students are asked to think about how this kitchen could be improved so that a wheelchair user could use it more easily. Again the language is contextualised, and sentence patterns emerge naturally.

*If the cooker were lower, the person would be able to see what he was cooking.*

At a more advanced level, when students are able to use abstract language, we have a lesson which stimulates students to examine their own preconceived ideas of disability and think about stereotyping. The lesson focuses on vocabulary, and students have to match a long list of personal attributes such as *capable, depressed, fun to be with, lonely, popular, shy, proud, confident* with their best friend, then allocate the words to pictures of two young women – one of whom is a wheelchair user. When they have done this, they are asked to consider whether the attributes had more to do with someone's body or their soul and think about why they made the choices they did.

In order to make EFL teachers aware of what we have to offer, we need to actively promote our campaign. What follows is a summary of our activities and achievements in 2012. We attended or were represented at 42 EFL events worldwide in Austria, Brazil, Dominican Republic, France, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Luxembourg, Poland, Serbia, South Korea, Spain, Turkey, and UK. 22 articles were published either by us or about us in the EFL press. Our mailing list was expanded and over 3,600 people are regularly kept up to date with our activities. Our Facebook page was improved and we joined Twitter. The content of the site was increased and now provides over 60 EFL free lesson plans and 40 free graded reading texts at all levels, as well as a specially produced video clip on Wheelchair Etiquette. We were supported by New Editions / Cengage Learning, who initiated an e-mail campaign and the distribution of campaign poster/leaflets to foreign language schools in Greece. Sales representatives from Burlington books also distributed flyers to foreign language schools in Greece. Sylvia Kar Publications created an exam practice text around the Disabled Access Friendly campaign. Our website was selected by the EDTECH HUB as their website of the month, and The Disabled Access Friendly campaign was awarded the Julia Tanner memorial scholarship by TESOL Macedonia-Thrace, N. Greece, which will allow us to present our work at the IATEFL (International Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language) conference in Liverpool in April 2013.

Has it been worth it? Well, just to give you a recent example, in January 2013 we had 11, 275 page hits on our website from 2,520 individual visitors from 73 different countries. If we presume that each of those visitors is a teacher who uses our material in class, and we do some Maths, we can see the potential number of children we have reached and who, as a result of our efforts, may now be more aware of and sensitive to issues facing people with mobility disability:

2,520 teachers x 1? student = 2,520  
2,520 teachers x 10? students = 25,200  
2,520 teachers x 100? students = 252,000

We believe that education is for improving the lives of others and for leaving our community better than we found it. Thank you to everyone who believes in us and supports us in our efforts to do this.

#### **CONTACT US**

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