



Website of The Month: Disabled Access Friendly

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From this month onwards, I'm going to be sharing some of my favourite online sites that offer resources for teaching and learning English. To kick off this new series, it's my great pleasure to introduce Katie Quartano, who has kindly agreed to be interviewed about the Disabled Access Friendly campaign, which seeks to raise awareness about issues affecting people with mobility disability.

Read on to find out more and learn how you can help to spread the word about the campaign, and contribute materials.



Katie Quartano and Paul Shaw Image credit: Disabled Access Friendly Campaign

Sue: How did the Disabled Access Friendly campaign begin?

Katie: It began when an article by Paul Shaw called "A day in the life of a disabled person" was published by the Athens News in 2009. The article provoked a lot of response, and encouraged Paul to take things one step further and to start a Facebook page called Disabled Access Friendly. At this point the campaign aimed only to encourage private foreign language schools in Greece to improve access for people with mobility disability. Since then we have developed somewhat and slightly changed direction. Now our focus is on offering free English language teaching materials that raise awareness about issues affecting people with mobility disability. And we are no longer just talking about Greece. Because the teaching material we provide is not culturally based and is available free online, it is available to and relevant to teachers worldwide.

Sue: Tell us something about your organisation, and the people behind the campaign.

Katie: Well, the first thing is that we are a completely voluntary organisation. Nobody is making any money, nobody is selling anything and nobody is promoting their own career. We've all made a living out of EFL over the years, and this is a chance for us to use this experience and expertise to put something back into the world. We are a small core team in Thessaloniki, me, Paul Shaw, Luke Prodromou and Effie Nabhan, and we work really hard. Paul has been working in Greece for 20 years in EFL as a teacher, teacher trainer, EFL oral examiner and materials editor. Luke is a freelance teacher trainer and materials writer, and Effie has a wealth of experience as a teacher and social worker. My background is more in tourism and business administration, but I also have an EFL qualification and have worked for years as an EFL examiner. Very importantly we also have English Language experts from other countries promoting our work at various ELT events and through their own networks. We call these people "ambassadors". A couple of examples are Lindsay Clandfield and Jeffrey Doonan, who have been strong supporters of our work right from the beginning. Lindsay has promoted our work at ELT events such as BrazTESOL in Rio de Janeiro, and he's about to take us to the ABLA Convention in the Dominican Republic and Jeffrey has given us a lot of visibility in Turkey. There are lots of other people working with us in ways that don't show quite so much but are equally important. For example, volunteers have helped set up our website and others help man our stands at exhibitions. We've also been fortunate enough to have organisations contribute in kind with the printing of leaflets and posters for example.

Sue: What are the main aims of the campaign?

Katie: Well, just to be clear, we are not a campaign about teaching children or adults with disabilities. What we want to do is to increase awareness **about** mobility disability among English language students. The campaign's free online material facilitates teachers in developing students' social conscience, making lessons meaningful, and encouraging critical thinking through a curriculum of social empathy. Our lesson plans and reading texts stimulate students to put themselves in the shoes of someone with a mobility disability and to think critically about issues of infrastructure, attitudes, behaviour, opportunities, stereotyping and preconceived ideas. Ultimately we hope

that having been exposed to these issues and encouraged to think critically about them, we can initiate some positive changes, so that people with mobility disability are less isolated and more empowered to lead independent lives.

Sue: What kind of lesson materials do you provide?

Katie: Well, the material falls into two broad categories - lessons and graded reading texts, and for both we cover the full range - right from young learners or adult beginner level, in other words A1 level, to proficiency or C2 level. The lessons are very varied in style as they have been written by different authors - some are based round video clips, others may use drama and others are worksheets with exercises. There is a huge variety. What they all have in common is that apart from teaching or practicing English language skills, they also stimulate students to think about some issues affecting people with mobility disability. This could be a wheelchair user being denied the right to attend a drama school or how a wheelchair user feels when he is asked by complete strangers how he has ended up in a wheelchair. Examples of the reading texts are the difficulties a bride-to-be faces looking for a wedding dress that won't get caught up in the wheels of her wheelchair, and a special buggy for parents who are wheelchair users to use for their babies. These are things that most of us have never even considered.

Sue: Can you give some examples of how teachers might use your materials in the classroom?

Katie: Yes. This is a very good question, because particularly at beginner level it can be hard to imagine how you can go about the task of raising social awareness when your students have such very limited language skills, and if they are also very young, not much experience of the world. Let's look at an example of a very simple worksheet practising "can" and "can't". The lesson follows the familiar pattern of a couple of young children who can or can't play different sports or do various activities. The only difference here is that one of the children, Helen, is a wheelchair user. We see that she **can** play tennis, she **can** play basketball etc. But when Helen would like to chill out with her friend Jenny at Jenny's house, we see a picture of Jenny's house, which has a lot of steps up to the entrance, and the sentence has to start with "she **can't**". The teacher doesn't have to say anything, or even introduce the lesson as one talking about mobility disability. The message comes across on its own. Kids will start to think a little about infrastructure.

Sue, your own lesson "Anna's New Job" is another good example that I could give. The lesson practices the present simple and the past simple and the future with "will" and "going to". But at the same time it stimulates learners to challenge stereotyping of disability and to think critically about attitudes to people with mobility disability. How's it done? We meet Anna, a wheelchair user, who is applying for a new job. Students are asked to think about whether she will only be able to do easy tasks and speculate about whether she will work slowly or take lots of days off sick. They have to imagine they want to find out more about Anna and decide which of a list of questions would be appropriate or inappropriate to ask her. The list includes questions like "Did you have an accident?" and "Will you ever get better?"

Sue: Who writes the materials for your campaign?

Katie: Again volunteers. These include well known materials writers like Michael Swan, Philip Kerr and Luke Prodromou, but also lots of ordinary, everyday English language teachers from all over the world.

Sue: How can people contribute materials?

They just need to contact us. Our e-mail address is on the website. We would love to hear from them!

Sue: What type of contributions are you looking for?

Katie: We welcome anything from a fully fledged lesson plan with teacher's notes to a simple idea that needs developing. I would suggest people have a look at our author's guidelines, which are on our site, and of course it's important to remember that our campaign is only about mobility disability, not all kinds of disability

Sue: What can people do to help to spread the word about the campaign?

Katie: I think everyone involved in ELT can help here and there are lots of ways to spread the word. For example you can do something as simple as talk to your colleagues about the campaign and show them the site. You can use your own professional networks to disseminate information - most people follow a blog like this one, or belong to a teacher's association of some description. You can print our poster from our site and display it at your school, or take things a step further and contact us before you visit an ELT event to see if you could help spread the word there. You can also download banner images to display on your blog and link back to us from our website, here:

http://www.disabled-accessfriendly.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=94&Itemid=233

Sue: Will you be at any conferences in the near future?

Katie: Yes, we certainly will. We have a poster presentation at TESOL France this month and Jamie Keddie will be including our work in his presentation at an international symposium on Web Technologies in ELT Classrooms in Istanbul in December. We were awarded the Julia Tanner Memorial Scholarship to do a workshop at IATEFL in Liverpool in April, and we are currently involved in a series of educational seminars for state school teachers in Greece.

Sue: Thank you, Katie!

That wraps up the first interview in this new series, and I hope you enjoyed it! The Disabled Access Friendly website has a great collection of free resources that teachers can download to use in the classroom. Please stop by their website and take a look, and help to support this important and worthwhile campaign by spreading the word amongst your colleagues.

Sue