Living with Disabilities

A recent study has discovered that disabled people in the United Kingdom are hugely disadvantaged in everyday life[[1]](#endnote-1). The government are already spending £50bn per year to help them, but is it enough[[2]](#endnote-2)?

To find out more, I interviewed blind climber Red Szell who has achieved his childhood dream by being the first person to climb the Old Man of Hoy while blind[[3]](#endnote-3). He now is an inspiration for other blind climbers like Jesse Dufton[[4]](#endnote-4).

Red is a neighbour who I really admire and luckily he lives just across the road to me.

After Red was diagnosed with Retinitis Pigmentosa aged 19, he stopped climbing for 20 years. During his daughter’s ninth birthday party he asked the coaches at the local climbing wall if they would be happy to teach him and they responded:

“Why wouldn’t we be prepared to give lessons to a blind person? You just want to climb. We just see the climber; we don’t see the disability”.

With the help of his coach and his training partner he was ready to take on the five-hour climb.

“There was this moment just before the top where there was this big crack in the rock […] I could feel the wind coming through and the sun shining on my face and everything and I just thought “Wow, if I hadn’t gone blind I would never have done this” and it just allowed me to make more sense of my blindness and to accept it more.”

The support that Red was given in preparation for this climb was vital for the successful mission.

I was wondering what climbing means for Red.

“I can just forget that I’m blind when I’m climbing, I can just concentrate on going up and I am using my hands and my feed, I don’t have to hold a white stick, I don’t have to worry about people wandering down the pavement with their smartphones on not looking where they’re going.”

Blind people have a lot of difficulties when it comes to everyday life. Red can’t pick up a can of baked beans without somebody checking the label for him. Crossing the road and walking on crowded pavements is very dangerous for him. He cannot read books and doesn’t know what his wife and daughters look like. Technology helps with some of the issues, but it doesn’t make up for his blindness.

In conclusion I would argue that people with disabilities really need more governmental support. But it is also up to us to believe in them and help them achieve their goals. Although they do need help, they are not helpless. Disabled role models are important to show what they can achieve, but we need to adjust the environment to support them.

“It’s why it’s really important that you see disabled people more on the TV and realise that actually quite a large part of the population is disabled as it could be you. “ *Red Szell*

1. Being disabled in Britain- A journey less equal, Equality and human rights commission, April 2017 [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Disabled people ‘left behind in society’, report finds, BBC news, 03 April 2017 [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. The Blind Man of Hoy, Red Szell, 16 Apr 2015 [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Blind climber leads an ascent of the Old Man of Hoy, BBC News, 06 June 2019

Author: Theresa Schauer (9) in interview with Red Szell (50) [↑](#endnote-ref-4)