



Information about Real

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About Real as a user-led organisation of disabled people

Real is a user-led organisation set up and managed by disabled thanks so people who live, work, volunteer or study in Tower Hamlets. 100% of our board and a significant majority of our staff and volunteers are disabled. We are a registered charity (number 1061671) and a company limited by guarantee (company number 3213172).

Real is the only user-led organisation in Tower Hamlets supporting disabled people across the borough of all impairment types, all age groups, all ethnicities and all other protected characteristics.

We primarily work with disabled people who live, work, study or volunteer in Tower Hamlets.

We are already led by our constituents through our constitution, membership structures and user involvement. Our strategy explicitly places our constituents and their interests at the heart of all that we do, and requires us to evolve some of our ways of working in order to reach more people, find out more about their concerns, and co-develop responsive initiatives to create lasting change.

Being user-led is fundamental to who we are, and what we do, which is why our tagline is “Disabled people working together for real choices”. We are deeply rooted in the history of the disability rights movement, whose slogan “Nothing about us, without us” led to disabled people taking control of their future, because they knew what they needed to achieve equality.

Our understanding of disability

We are driven by and committed to both the social model of disability and the human rights model of disability.

We recognise that people are disabled, not by their impairment, but by the physical, communication, attitudinal, financial and legal barriers, and discriminatory behaviours and practices, that limit disabled people’s equal status in society whether at an individual or group level. We consider that our impairments are a natural part of human diversity and that disability is a label placed on us by others by what they perceive as difference from “normal”. We do not need to be “cured”; nor should we be expected to adjust our lives to fit in with others’ expectations.

We focus on the dignity of disabled people, and strive to ensure that disabled people achieve all of their human rights. Addressing the lack of achievement of human rights is as important as overcoming discrimination. We work with our constituents to help them understand, access and enjoy their rights as laid out in the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities¹, and in particular:

- equality before the law without discrimination
- the right to make their own decisions
- the right to have their family life respected
- freedom from exploitation, violence and abuse

¹ <https://www.disabilityrightsuk.org/policy-campaigns/campaigns/equally-ours-campaign/guide-un-disability-convention>

- an inclusive education
- a decent standard of living
- support to participate in society and live in the community
- accessible physical environments and information.

In terms of considering who is disabled we consider it is anyone who has an impairment, illness, injury or long-term health condition and who may face barriers to being included in society, whether they self-identify as disabled or not. This includes but is not limited to an Equality Act 2010 definition of disability². For the avoidance of doubt our constituency includes but is not limited to Deaf people, people with learning disabilities, people with sensory impairments, people with physical impairments or differences, people with mental health conditions, people with autistic spectrum conditions, people with long-term health conditions, including diabetes, epilepsy and people who are HIV positive.

We recognise the complexity of multiple impairments, and the multiple disadvantages disabled people may face when they also have other characteristics protected under by the Equality Act 2010³. We also recognise the differential experience of disability by those who were born with impairments, and those who acquired their impairments through illness, injury or ageing.

What makes us “Real”

Our vision

Real’s vision is of an equal and diverse society free from the barriers that stop disabled people from living their lives the way they want.

Our mission

Real’s mission is to protect and uphold the human rights of disabled people in Tower Hamlets, and overcome discrimination, to enable disabled people to live as equal citizens.

We aim to help disabled people to live independently - where they choose, how they want, with all the support they need, and with the money they need to do it.

² <https://www.gov.uk/definition-of-disability-under-equality-act-2010>

³ <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/equality-act/protected-characteristics>

The name “**Real**” is not an acronym, but it does stand for the **real** jobs, **real** education, **real** incomes, **real** choices, and **real** participation in society that all disabled people deserve.

Real does not exist to give disabled people jobs at Real, but we do recognise that having disabled employees and volunteers is one of our strengths because we are more likely to connect and have empathy with the people that we are supporting through shared experience.

Our values

Our ethos is based on clear values of independence, user involvement, peer support and co-production. The following principles underpin our approach to everything we do:

1. Human Rights-based: we support people to achieve their human rights. Disabled people have the same rights as everyone else and should not have to rely on conventional concepts of charity to achieve equality.
2. Empowering: we are a people-based organisation. We build relationships based on mutual trust; creating a safe and empowering environment which is encouraging, and collaborative. We believe in supporting people to make choices and live their lives the way that they want, and not making decisions for them. Wherever possible interactions with our constituents will seek to impart skills and confidence that support them to take control of their own future.
3. Inclusive, diverse and respectful: we respect people and are committed to equality. We value and celebrate diversity, equality and freedom of expression throughout all our activities.
4. Person-centred and accessible: we recognise that people have different communication and access needs, and preferences for ways of working, and we seek to work with people their way whenever we can.
5. User-led: at all levels of our organisation we are led and controlled by disabled people, and influenced by their views.
6. Accountable: we aim to be accountable to and representative of the communities we work within. We strive to be open and transparent.
7. Democratic: we are run by and democratically accountable to our membership; consisting of disabled people and non-disabled allies.

Real as a charity

Whilst Real is technically a charity, we are mindful not to do anything in our fundraising, our actions or the way that we work with people that might disempower disabled people or perpetuate historic perceptions that disabled people should be pitied.

Real's strategic objectives

Real is currently finalising our new strategic plan. We are almost certainly going to have the following for strategic objectives for the next five years. In each case we explain underneath why we've chosen them.

1. Disabled people have increased income and an improved standard of living

The evidence shows that disabled people:

- a more likely to be in poverty
- are less likely to be in work
- even if they are in work, are likely to be on a lower income
- have higher costs of living
- are more likely to be digitally and financially excluded.

2. Disabled people are better able to live independently, express their views, and participate in their communities

The evidence shows that:

- there is a lack of good, meaningful social care and support, delivered how people want
- there is a lack of access to affordable, accessible housing
- disabled people don't get heard or can't influence in the way they want
- there are particular challenges for young disabled people.

3. Disabled people are better able to access services, facilities and activities that meet their needs

The evidence shows that:

- there are not enough reasonable adjustments under the Equality Act
- there are barriers to inclusion all across private and public provision of services
- transport and the built environment not accessible
- people who are not online are getting left behind.

4. There is attitudinal change around disability

We need to change society, not just support disabled people, because:

- People's attitudes are the biggest barriers
- of negative reporting and valuing of disabled people, especially in some of the press
- stigma and negative attitudes causing hate crime and hate incidents

- family and other people's expectations of our abilities can make things worse.

Our model of change

We work in a variety of ways, with individuals, groups and others, to support disabled people and make change happen.



The national context

We follow the Centre for Independent Living model developed in the USA and the User Led Organisation (ULO) model that evolved from this concept within the UK.

The UK government has asked for each local authority with a social services duty to support a ULO in their area. The defining criteria are that the ULO will:

- work from a social model of disability perspective
- promote independent living
- promote people's human and other legal rights
- be shaped and driven by the initiative and demand of our constituency
- be peer support based
- cover all local disabled people, carers and other people who use support either directly or through links with other local organisations and networks
- be non-discriminatory and work with diversity in terms of race, religion and belief, gender, sexual orientation, disability and age
- engage constituents in decision-making at every level of the organisation

The ULO's organisational structure should:

- provide support to enable people to exercise choice and control
- be a legally constituted organisation

- have at least 75% of the voting members on the management board drawn from our constituency
- be able to demonstrate that the organisation's constituents are effectively supported to play a full and active role in key decision-making
- have a clear management structure
- have robust and rigorous systems for running a sustainable organisation
- be financially sustainable and not reliant on central government funding
- have paid employees, many of whom must reflect our constituency
- identify the diverse needs of the local population and help to meet them
- be accountable to our constituents and represent their views locally
- involve constituents in designing, delivering and monitoring our services
- work with commissioners to improve commissioning and procurement

We are the leading ULO of disabled people in Tower Hamlets.

Our place in the disability rights movement

The mantra of the disability rights movement is 'Nothing about us, without us'. We have a responsibility to use our combined strength to challenge social injustice, oppression, privilege, prejudice, inequality and inaccessibility.

We want decision makers to put disabled people at the heart of the decisions that affect us. The movement fights for the right of disabled people to be involved in all aspects of society and for our needs to be respected.

We share the spirit of the disability rights movement.

Our working environment

We have office space at Jack Dash House not far from Canary Wharf. Real moved everyone off site in March 2020 at the beginning of the pandemic. We had recently moved to the office 365 environment and we were very proud that we managed to continue delivering all of our services throughout all of the lockdowns.

We are starting to have conversations with staff about moving back to a real-world environment, but this will be based around meeting clients' priorities and needs, and ensuring everyone stays safe.

It's likely that very few office environments will return 100% to office-based working, given the way that we have seen how remote working can be beneficial (and especially in terms of work-life balance and supporting people with fluctuating health conditions). What's most important is that the job gets done. It is unlikely that we would want anyone to work 100% remotely, on a permanent basis, but our approach is going to be working out what works for everyone involved.