

Disability history

Historically, the treatment of people with disabilities has been far from fair. Aristotle was one of the first to denounce the validity of this marginalised group by 'proclaiming that deaf people do not have the same innate intelligence as a hearing person since they are incapable of language' (Rehabilitating Aristotle, Garret Merriam, 2010). Sadly this thinking has set the standard for how we view people with disabilities for more than a millennium.

It has taken the continuous effort and activism from the disability community to change the perceptions of people with disabilities in society today. But there is still much left to be done if we are to make the cultural shift needed to ensure people with disabilities enjoy the same rights as people without a disability. This section charts some key turning points in disability and Leonard Cheshire's own history over the last 100 years.

1911

The National Insurance Act passed, forming a system to fund health insurance for industrial workers and unemployment and sickness benefits. This marked the start of the modern social welfare system in the UK.

1919

In response to the thousands of injured soldiers returning from WWI, the **Central Council for the Care of Cripples** was set up. The organisation still exists today as Disability Rights UK.



1944

The **Disabled Persons Employment Act** was passed setting up a quota system for larger employers to hire people with disabilities as part of their workforce.

1911

1919

1918

1944

1918

The Education Act made schooling for all children with disabilities compulsory, giving them the right to education. However, many institutions that schooled children with disabilities were harsh and segregated them from the rest of society.



1944

The **Education Act** was passed, which accepted that mainstream education was the most suitable option for children with disabilities. Segregated schools were deemed a failure and hindered the development of children's interpersonal skills.



1946

The first Invacar was designed and built, a government-funded response to the lack of accessible transport for people with disabilities. It was scrapped and replaced by the **Motability Scheme** in 1977.

1949

By summer 1949, Leonard's home had 24 residents with a range of disabilities. More homes soon followed, and the charity now known as **Leonard Cheshire** was born.



1962

A protest by residents led to changes in the philosophy of the Le Court management committee and other Cheshire Homes towards the **social model of disability**.

1946

1949

1962

1948

1955



1948

Leonard Cheshire's story starts! Leonard Cheshire welcomes dying ex-serviceman Arthur Dykes (pictured left) into his home in Hampshire, 'Le Court', the first Leonard Cheshire Home.

The first Paralympic Games were held in Stoke Mandeville. This coincided with the 1948 London Olympic games.



1955

The first overseas independent home founded by Leonard Cheshire, **Bethlehem House**, opened in Mumbai, India.





1972

The **Disability Rights Movement** was birthed as a result of a letter by Paul Hunt (pictured above, centre) to the Guardian demanding equality and solidarity amongst people with disabilities. Read his story in **The history of disability activism**.



1981

The Disabled People's International group was formed with the slogan of **"Nothing About Us Without Us"**.

The British Council of Organisations of Disabled People was set up, the first national coalition of organisations controlled by people with disabilities to campaign for equality and human/civil rights.

1996

Due to campaigning from the **Independent Living Institute**, direct payments for social care were legalised, setting up the structure for the self-directed support of people with disabilities.

1972

1981

1996

1970

1976

1995

1970

The **Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act** was passed finally giving rights to people with disabilities to receive a range of services from local authorities, such as welfare and housing.

1976

'The Cheshire Foundation Homes for the Sick' was officially changed to **'The Leonard Cheshire Foundation'** recognising that people with disabilities did not wish to be referred to as 'the sick'.



1995

After countless protests and campaigning by people with disabilities, the watershed **Disability Discrimination Act** was passed, making it illegal to discriminate against people with disabilities in all civil acts. All service providers now must enable access to people with disabilities. Find out more in the BBC article **When disabled people took to the streets**.

1996

The **National Centre for Independent Living (NCIL)** was co-founded by Baroness Jane Campbell DBE of Surbiton, an active leader for the independent living campaign.



2011

Hardest Hit campaign was organised by the Disability Benefits Consortium and the UK Disabled People's Council, lobbying the government about the impact of welfare cuts. Around 8,000 people with disabilities attended the march on Parliament in May.

2014

Change 100 was launched by Leonard Cheshire, a national programme matching talented undergraduates with disabilities to paid internships at some of the UK's leading companies.



2017

The United Nations Council on the Rights of Disabled People committee published a report on the UK government's violations against people with disabilities in the UNCRPD. The report criticised the government for failing to successfully implement policies protecting the welfare rights of people with disabilities. Access the **UN Committee ruling here** and the UK government response.

The struggle continues!

1998

2011

2014

2017

2010

2012

2010

The UK Government approved the **United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)**, which was adopted at the UN in December 2006.

The Equality Act was passed, replacing the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. It broadened (some say weakened) discrimination legislation to include other protected characteristics including disability.

2012

The **Paralympic Games** was held in London and marked a watershed moment on mainstream TV coverage of athletes with disabilities. Pictured right is Paralympian and Leonard Cheshire ambassador Olivia Breen.

