

## Accidents at the inclusion traffic lights Mistakes and misunderstandings in supporting people to achieve social inclusion

By Peter Bates, National Development Team for Inclusion

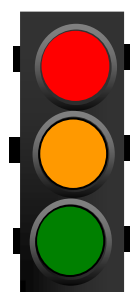
The NDTi's *inclusion traffic lights* have been widely adopted as a helpful way of thinking about services.

### An example

*The link between day centres and colleges of further education provides an example of the inclusion traffic lights. Bringing the college tutor into the day centre to run a computer class is an example of a 'red' service because the class is held in a disability building (the day centre) and all the other classmates are people with disabilities. If the class is transferred to the college building, but the students remain together, then it is counted as 'amber'. If one student then leaves this special class and is supported to participate in a mainstream class that is open to other citizens, then this counts as 'green'.*

### The traffic lights can help

UK Government policy encourages health and social care agencies to provide more support in 'green' settings. This is where most people want to live their lives, as valued roles and relationships in the wider community increase life opportunities for all, challenge stigma and confer status. The traffic lights have helped people to:



*Disability places: just staff and people using services*

*Ordinary places, but a 'user-only' group*

*Side by side with the general public*

- (a) Think about where staff and people using services are spending their time
- (b) Develop a shared understanding of what is provided now
- (c) Reflect on the balance of investment in different kinds of provision
- (d) Create a shared plan for the future shape of services
- (e) Identify the skills that staff currently have and need in the future
- (f) Monitor progress.

Every idea can be misunderstood or misused, so we have identified some of the common accidents that can happen with the *inclusion traffic lights*. They are explained below.

### **Accident #1: Inclusion is the only thing.**

Accidents happen when people decide that the traffic lights are the only way of deciding on the worth of an activity. Instead of recognising that the world is splendidly complex, we simplify things to either 'good' or 'bad'. If it is red it is bad and should be stopped. Staff get hurt when they are told that almost everything that they have been doing up until now has been wrong.

### **Accident #2: Red and amber are always bad for people.**

We withdraw any opportunities for people who use services to mix with one another in an effort to promote inclusion. Friendships between people using services are devalued and peer support is reframed as exclusion. People are hurt as their needs for bonding relationships are frustrated in a misguided effort to starve them into mixing with the wider community. In addition, if we fail to pay enough attention to the visible and invisible benefits that people have been receiving from red and amber services (especially people with the highest support needs), then so-called 'replacement services' in green will be inadequate and accidents will happen.

### **Accident #3: Any old mix will do.**

Our service has a mix of red, amber and green support, so that is fine. Accidents happen when people are satisfied with the status quo and ignore the challenge to change the way in which services are provided.

### **Accident #4: Green workers are the best.**

We agree that the service needs more green opportunities and so we actively develop this aspect of the service. Accidents happen when we give all the best workers the green jobs, along with all the training and recognition, while the rest are consigned to the red and amber services, where we ignore them or act as if we were ashamed of them.

### **Accident #5: The most disabled people belong in red.**

Our range of services mean that we can provide red for the people who are very disabled, amber of the people with medium levels of disability and green for the most independent people. Accidents happen when the most disabled people are denied better life chances.

### **Accident #6: Green means self-sufficiency.**

We have some people who have made their own way into mainstream community participation, so we can dedicate our staff resources to supporting people who need amber or red services. People who need support to access community opportunities are hurt if this support is not available.

### **Accident #7: Amber is a stepping-stone.**

Accidents happen when we assume that everyone in red services must pass through amber to get to green. Every amber group is a showcase that suggests to community agencies that some people need 'special' segregated provision. Accidents then happen to people who could have made the jump directly from red to green.

### **Accident #8: Everything fits into the model.**

Every idea has its limitations. Instead of using it until it stops helping and then finding a better idea, we fall into one or two errors. Perhaps we stretch and bend the real world to make it conform to our traffic light viewpoint (so, for example, we feel obliged to assign a colour to the timebank based at a GP surgery or to a staffed house for two disabled friends). Alternatively, we elaborate the traffic lights with new options, and end up classifying projects into absurd sub-categories such as 'red/amber with green edges'. Accidents happen when our rigid view of the world keeps us from simply listening to what people say and valuing their creativity.

### **Accident #9: The traffic lights are separate.**

Few, if any localities have decided to eliminate all red and amber provision (even if some individual service providers in the patch offer nothing but green). Up to now, few people would claim that they know how to support everyone all the time in green, whilst keeping everyone safe. So, in the meantime, we maintain a mix of red, amber and green provision. The people in each part of the service have distinct skills and approaches. If they fail to respect one another, learn how the other works or establish positive working relationships, then people are trapped and hurt.

### **Accident #10: We assume things.**

The strong image of the traffic lights can encourage people to clump themselves or other people together and make assumptions about what everyone in that group wants. These assumptions might be things like, 'all service users want red', 'staff won't want to work in green', or 'politicians want to reduce costs by eliminating expensive red services'. Secondly, we can assume what green services are needed and then slot people into them without asking what they want. Such assumptions lead to accidents.

### **Accident #11: Green is cheap.**

The focus on closing segregated buildings, strengthening communities, promoting informal support and levering in funds from elsewhere can all lead people to assume that funding for specialist services can be cut. Whilst a healthy community will one day reduce the damage inflicted by discrimination and exclusion, accidents happen when funding is reduced before community supports are in place.

### **Accident #12: Green just comes natural.**

Staff have been eager to do green work for years but have lacked the political permission, space in their work schedule and petty cash budget. Accidents happen when managers think that all that is needed is enthusiasm, and staff attempt green initiatives without appropriate training, access to the lessons learnt elsewhere and supportive policies and procedures.

### **Conclusion**

Most people who use services want to spend more of their time in ordinary community settings. The UK Government has told services that they need to increase the time that staff spend in supporting people in their communities. The NDTi's *inclusion traffic lights* provide a helpful way of thinking about this. However, like any idea, it can be misunderstood and misused and so care is needed to apply the approach thoughtfully and responsibly.

