A day in the life of a disabled person

I WOKE up on December 3 with a feeling that for some reason today was my day, whether I wanted it or not. As I shuffled over onto the wheelchair, I wondered what the International Day of Disabled Persons would have in store. I turned on the radio to cheer up a chilly morning and made my way for a shower. Nothing better than a hot shower on a cold morning - I used the rails bought and fitted by friends to help me get into the shower. Social services don't make any assessment of the living conditions of the disabled - that's up to us.

On the radio, a cheerful DJ was reminding citizens of the day and to pay attention to where they park - avoiding the ramps - stating chirpily that it was all down to education.

I don't know what came over me, but for the first time in my life I decided to call the station. I praised them for their mentioning the day, adding that it would be an eye-opening education for politicians to use my wheelchair for a day and see how the 400 ramps in my city 'work' - an offer I made several months ago. The pleasant production assistant asked politely, "But why are you calling?" I slowly took a breath and stated as simply as I could that it's not just education of my fellow citizens that was required but also of politicians. She stated in a bewildered tone, "But we are not that kind of show - we just play music. However, I'll pass your message along." And the music carried on playing and again we were reminded about the ramps. But had they listened to me?

Before any person in a wheelchair leaves their house alone, deep inside - no matter how positively you see the world and smile at the ups and downs of life - there is that burning hope that today will be an easy day.

Just before I left the house, the "Home help" arrived - provided by a European project, they do everything for you outside the house: my prescription for IKA was taken care of with a smile and another appointment for the following month was made. I remembered that I had to call the cleaner. Having a very weak immune system, I must have the house as microbes-free as possible. That was organised for next Wednesday, if all's well. Again, I pay for this.

So, time for emergency shopping before physiotherapy. I was lucky enough to have friends who had found me a house with a large lift and a garage door which I can open and free myself into the city I love. Ok, I had to wait until my neighbour, who parks directly in front

of my exit, came out and moved his car. We've already had it discussed. His reply: "Just shout out, you know where I am."

My freedom relies on him listening to me.

My first stop was the post office. I was quickly up the ramp and to the desk designed for disabled persons. I didn't have to wait and the staff treated me as a friend, helping me in any way they could. Next, I was off to the bank. Due to the new security doors where one of your pictures was taken, I couldn't get in. I had to knock on a side door to be let in.

My freedom relies on them listening to me.

I stopped at my favourite coffee shop to have my dose of caffeine - couldn't stay long, there are no bathrooms I can get in. Before I returned home I did a bit of window shopping. That's all somebody in a wheelchair can do - window shop. You can't get in. The next time you go shopping see for yourself how many of your favourite shops have steps. At times I am served on the street - providing the shop assistant sees and listens to me; otherwise I am invisible.

Next, my favourite place, the old market. They treat me like a friend there: I know their names - they know mine. They place the bag on my knees so it wouldn't fall off.

It was time to go home. There is one corner on a main street near my house that has no ramp, so I either ask for help or wait, and everybody listens, seeing me in the middle of the street. They even get out of their cars and off their bikes to help.

They do listen to me and apologise for our city - but should I have to ask for help in the first place?

Eventually, I arrive home. There is that feeling of relief that I am home, safe. I place on my bracelet with a red button. If anything happens I can press the button and a radio transmitter in the house will connect me to a volunteer service who will call friends or for medical help.

They will listen to me.

When the day ended I heard more promises on the news for persons with disabilities. I was listening - was anyone else?

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