

County Council – 6 November 2020

Item 9(b) - Notice of Motion by Cllr Edwards

Hidden Disability – Briefing Note

The objective of the Hidden Disabilities Sunflower is to indicate to people around the wearer that they are likely to need additional support, help or a little more time. While some disabilities are visible e.g. using a wheelchair, a white stick, others are not. Those with hidden disabilities – such as autism, learning disabilities, sensory impairments, dementia, mental health difficulties – have needs that are not immediately obvious and can encounter impatience, misunderstanding and hostility due to being misinterpreted by those around them.

The Hidden Disabilities Sunflower was launched in 2016 and since then has been adopted by many major airports, including Gatwick, by major supermarkets such as Marks and Spencers and Tesco, small independent stores, by a growing number of visitor attractions and train operators including Network Rail, Govia Thameslink Railway, SWR and Southeastern.

There are some other products with a similar objective e.g. Gatwick Airport also uses a JAM card (Just a Minute) which allow those with learning disabilities, autism and communication barriers to tell others they need a little longer. Sussex Police use a Pegasus card for those with disabilities.

The Hidden Disabilities Sunflower can be worn on a lanyard or carried as a card in a wallet or purse to be shown as required. Reviews from users (on Facebook) have been positive, especially in relation to travel but also some good experiences in supermarkets.

Businesses and organisations register to join the scheme and can decide whether or not to be added to the online location map. Members of the scheme are expected to train their staff to identify the Hidden Disabilities Sunflower, to gain a deeper understanding of hidden disabilities and learn how to approach customers with a hidden disability. Training videos are provided once an organisation has purchased a starter pack or spent more than £500 on Hidden Disabilities Sunflower products (available from hiddendisabilitiestore.com). Organisations are then asked to make these products freely available to customers.

During COVID-19 the Hidden Disability Sunflower Lanyard has been used to indicate exemption from wearing a face covering. This is a personal choice as some people with hidden disabilities do not want to wear a lanyard.

Government guidance states: 'Those who have an age, health or disability reason for not wearing a face covering should not be routinely asked to give any written evidence of this, this includes exemption cards. No person needs to seek advice or request a letter from a medical professional about their reason for not wearing a face covering. Some people may feel more comfortable showing something that says they do not have to wear a face covering. This could be in the form of an exemption card, badge or even a home-made sign. This is a personal choice and is not necessary in law'.

The adoption of the scheme would be of particular relevance for staff with customer-facing roles. Training and awareness raising would be required to support any use of the scheme.

Alan Adams

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