

# HEADING BEYOND ACCESSIBILITY



How a new campaign is helping colleagues to understand, anticipate and go beyond the expectations of customers with additional needs

**B**ritish Airways helped my 91-year-old dad realise his dream." So says Janet Allison, who accompanied her elderly and disabled father on a trip from Texas to London this August. Norlyn 'Bud' Allison has advanced Parkinson's and is a wheelchair user, but that doesn't mean he has lost his wanderlust.

"It was his dream to visit the UK one last time with his daughters to see several of his friends, including long-time friend and BA employee Sherrie Oxnard. So, with her encouragement, my sister and I booked tickets," says Janet.

It was always going to be a significant and potentially stressful journey for both her and Bud. But from the booking and pre-flight preparation to the day of travel itself, Janet received exceptional customer service and reassurance from our colleagues.

"Having people treat my dad like a regular person was the best part of all," she says. "Everyone was so welcoming and excited for him about the trip. They were very helpful and extra attentive to anything I needed help with."

**"HAVING PEOPLE TREAT MY DAD LIKE A REGULAR PERSON WAS THE BEST PART OF ALL"**

Janet Allison, Customer

"caring, supportive and empathetic" airline, but having her friend experience it first-hand was a great feeling.

"I felt confident they'd be fine, but knowing they had such a positive experience and fantastic trip made me feel really proud," she says.



Family flight Sherrie Oxnard and Bud

**Going beyond**

Each year, we welcome on board nearly half a million customers who require additional assistance, and that number is increasing by an average of 8% year

The four main types of disability

Mobility



Hearing



Visual



Hidden



on year. A new campaign, Beyond Accessibility, is being launched this month, designed to give colleagues top tips so they can deliver an even better service to customers with different disabilities and needs. Improvements will also be rolled out over the next few months to make travel easier for them.

Mary Doyle, a life coach, disability equality trainer and BA customer, has seen a marked improvement in the attitude of colleagues and overall awareness as a business.

"After some bad flying experiences, I've seen a significant improvement in customer service and adapting to me as a customer. People are extremely helpful, friendly and willing to consider my requests, which may not be standard – such

as putting my small chair in the closet and wheels in an overhead bin," she says.

Mary believes providing a consistent additional assistance service is more important than ever for airlines, given the continuing growth in the number of customers

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Sherrie Oxnard, Concorde Team Executive

BE AVAILABLE

Always use your name and reassure customers that you are there to make their journey easier and simpler.

BEST TO ASK

It's better to understand the needs of our customers than to ignore them.

BEWARE ASSUMPTIONS

Not all disabilities are visible.

BE AWARE

Every customer is different and will require different needs.

choosing to travel by air.

"Having 'people first'-oriented staff is an important step. I am a human and a paying passenger first, a PRM [person with reduced mobility] second," says Mary.

Part of the Beyond Accessibility campaign's aim is to highlight that not all disabilities are visible. Colleagues need to be aware of hidden disabilities. Travelling with

autism, dementia, hearing impairment and irritable bowel disease, for example, can be an overwhelming and fraught experience.

## A customer's perspective



**BA customer Mary Doyle is the founder of Rocket Girl Coaching ([rocketgirlcoaching.com](http://rocketgirlcoaching.com)) and a disability equality trainer. She is also a solo pilot and an advocate for the Flying Disabled campaign**

### What are the biggest challenges you face when flying?

I've been extremely fortunate to travel worldwide, mostly alone. Each trip is different, and you may not be familiar with the airport or country. Attitudes vary significantly, but the one thing that never changes is the need to use the bathroom. Most passengers take this for granted, but as a wheelchair user I need to be sure there is an aisle chair on board, and staff who know how to handle it and understand not to leave me waiting when I say it's time for me to go.

### Have you had some bad experiences?

I had some shocking experiences a long time ago and a few minor ones recently. The worst was not being allowed to board in Bahrain after a month-long work trip. There were no staff to assist me and the gate clerk

shooed me away. I finally got two expats to carry me on to the plane and put me in the first available seat. It was the most humiliating experience of my life.

### Has it put you off travelling?

No. Despite everything, flying is still a joy to me. It's an adventure. I love the freedom, the random in-flight conversations. And it's enhanced by the quality of staff engagement I have throughout the terminal and flight.

### What one thing could colleagues do to improve your experience?

Always treat me as a human and paying passenger first. The additional assistance I need is a secondary factor. Always ask questions with respect and don't make assumptions about my needs. Communication and respect for my dignity are everything.

Daniel Cadey, from the National Autistic Society, says flying can prove particularly stressful for autistic people because many rely on routine.

"They can find the often busy, loud and unpredictable environment of an aircraft disorientating and overwhelming," he says.

He believes a few simple steps can go a long way to make it easier for autistic passengers and their families.

"Simply asking if there is any way in which to help, being patient, recognising that an autistic person may need more time to process information, and ensuring that families or groups, including autistic passengers, are not unexpectedly separated on boarding, can help reduce anxiety," he says.

Sherrie agrees, having had first-hand experience of travelling with her daughter, who has Down's syndrome.

"Flying can be a very stressful experience anyway, but when you add in additional needs then you enter a

## ACCESSIBILITY ROADSHOWS

**Gatwick**  
September 18-19

**Waterside**  
September 20

**GLA**  
September 26

**CRC**  
September 27-28

**London City**  
October 1

whole new stratosphere," she says. "It's great that British Airways is doing even more to make people's journeys that bit easier."

Look out for the interactive roadshows taking place over the

## GOING ABOVE AND BEYOND...

See every interaction as an opportunity to deliver great service and keep asking questions to determine customers' needs, as they will all vary.

 **Join the Disability Network Yammer group to share your views and to stay up to date on our enhancements for disabled customers.**

coming month that will aim to help colleagues gain a better understanding of what it's like to have a disability, and a handy communications guide to help us provide the best possible service to all customers with a disability. 