

## The Social Model of Disability

**Impairment** is an injury, illness, or congenital condition that causes or is likely to cause a long-term effect on appearance and/or limitation of function of the individual.

**Disability** is the loss or limitation of opportunities to take part in society on an equal level with others due to social and environmental barriers.

Impairments and chronic illness often pose real difficulties for disabled people but they are not the main problems. It is the 'barriers' which exist in society that create the main problems. The three main areas of barrier are:

- Environment (including inaccessible buildings and services)
- Attitudes (stereotyping, discrimination and prejudice)
- Organisations which operate inflexible procedures and practices

Disabling barriers experienced in the past can continue to have an adverse effect. For example, disabled people who attended segregated schools may have gained lower academic qualifications than their non-disabled peers, because their 'special' school failed to provide a proper mainstream curriculum.