# Purple Pioneer

## Outline what your nominee has done to champion disability equality over the past 12 months, highlighting any key achievements.

Jo has been championing equality for disabled people in Manchester for almost five years. Some of their key achievements include:

* working with local authorities to deliver disability equality training in schools and workplaces.
* working with LGBTQIA+ organisations to create more accessible and inclusive pride events.
* establishing a network for Autistic adults in Manchester.
* organising and facilitating workshops and support groups for the local disabled community.

## Impact: how has your nominee created a marked positive effect or influence on the lives of disabled people?

Jo’s work has had a clear and lasting impact on the disabled community in Manchester and beyond.

Through their work with local authorities, Jo has delivered disability equality training in over 45 schools and workplaces in Manchester and the North West. In a feedback survey, one participant said ‘the session has really helped me to understand the needs of my neurodiverse students. I now feel better equipped to support them in the classroom’.

Jo has also worked with multiple LGBTQIA+ organisations to make their events more accessible for disabled people. Manchester Pride has made changes to their physical access provision based on Jo’s recommendations. This resulted in a 20% increase in attendance of wheelchair users at the event.

Jo established a network for Autistic adults in Manchester in 2019. Since then, the network has grown to over 75 members who regularly meet for support groups, workshops and events. One network member said ‘it’s great to be part of a community who understand your experiences and can offer tailored support’.

Jo has also supported network members and colleagues by referring them to tailored support services in times of crisis.

## Creativity: how has your nominee generated new or novel solutions to problems, created new connections or original ideas?

In collaboration with local authorities, Jo has developed a new disability equality training course which is rooted in lived experience. This replaces an outdated training model which had not been co-produced with disabled people. Jo also integrated a greater focus on neurodiversity and invisible disabilities into the training. This has been very well received, with one survey participant commenting ‘the training was really eye opening and helped me realise how I might not have been sensitive to invisible disabilities in the past’.

Jo’s work with Manchester Pride was prompted by their own experience of poor accessibility as an attendee. After getting in touch with their recommendations, they were invited in as a co-producer to improve the accessibility of the event. The guidelines that Jo helped to create have since been shared among other regional Pride events. They have demonstrated how important it is to be proactive and creative in meeting the needs of disabled people.

Jo recognised a need for a network for Autistic adults in Manchester. Existing networks included those for parents and carers, as well as online, nationwide groups. Jo’s network is the first of its kind in Manchester with its adult and local focus. The group’s size and high level of engagement highlights Jo’s understanding of the community and success in creatively solving problems.

## Diversity and Inclusion: how has your nominee shown they are committed to highlighting the voices of all disabled people? Has their approach considered supporting disabled people that face other forms of discrimination in society? For example disabled people from Black, Asian, minority ethnic, LGBTQ+, and lower socio-economic backgrounds.

Jo’s work shows a great commitment to supporting disabled people from diverse communities and backgrounds. A great example is the work they have done to support Manchester Pride and other LGBTQ+ organisations. Jo identified that disabled people may not be able to attend Manchester Pride because of accessibility issues. Supporting improvements to accessibility at Manchester Pride and other LGBTQ+ events has had a tangible impact. It has supported LGBTQ+ disabled people and disabled allies to engage in important events such as Pride.

Jo’s work in creating a network for Autistic people has also been shaped by an approach that supports reaching diverse communities. When setting up the network, Jo proactively engaged with Black, Asian and minority ethnic community groups to encourage participation of Autistic adults from these communities in the group. Jo also secured funding to cover transport costs for people who needed it to attend sessions to ensure that finances were not a barrier to accessing the network.

These examples showcase the importance of diversity and inclusion in Jo’s initiatives, recognising the diversity of disabled people and ensuring that they are inclusive to all.

# Customer Inclusion

## Outline what your nominee has done to champion disability equality over the past 12 months, highlighting any key achievements.

Our Miles without Stiles routes give people with accessibility needs to experience the inspiring views of the Lake District, when previously they wouldn’t have been able to. This year:

* 19 volunteers surveyed 50 routes
* £85,000 worth of repairs and maintenance on exisiting routes
* 3.91km of accessible path added to create two new MWS routes: Sizergh and Holeslack Woods and Grasmere Jubilee
* 650K website visits to the MWS route pages
* 322,706 people on our popular Keswick to Threlkeld route

## Impact: how has your nominee created a marked positive effect or influence on the lives of disabled people?

Our Miles without Stiles (MWS) routes open barriers for disabled people to explore without worrying about getting to a stile or wall. They provide a connection with nature, which has proven to support mental well-being. A recent report revealed over 90% of people on our Keswick to Threlkeld route said they felt better as a result of using the trail.

Will, a wheelchair user in Grasmere and a member of our board, shared how the routes have helped his mental health. Will said, “Being able to get around the Lakes is significant in terms of mental well-being and general enjoyment.”

Read Will’s blog: Miles without Stiles championed at National Parks conference : <https://www.lakedistrict.gov.uk/the-blog/blog-posts/miles-without-stiles-championed-at-national-parks-conference>

Annie Wallen, Volunteer Coordinator for MWS, provides experience as a wheelchair user herself and a former conservation volunteer said:

“You get this feeling that you’re just away from everything, and that’s the magic. We try to give people that moment away from chaos. Miles without Stiles offers an incredible amount for many people.”

Other quotes from MWS users: “They offer so much and make getting out easier for those who struggle to navigate uneven paths. The Lake District National Park Authority have got accessibility right on every level.”

“I love following the Miles without Stiles routes in the Lake District”

“As a wheelchair user, being able to get outside is vital to our well-being'’

## Creativity: how has your nominee generated new or novel solutions to problems, created new connections or original ideas?

Our MWS board is made up of various colleagues and Annie, Volunteer Co-ordinator, a local wheelchair user. It was important to us to have someone with a disability on the board to help make decisions and be a voice for many disabled people.

Our team of volunteers who test and monitor the routes include wheelchair users. We have started to work with them to help write the route information on the website for inclusive language, understanding what a disabled person may need to know.

All routes are graded for 'all', 'many', 'some', or ‘challenging’ and are based on gradients and surface conditions. The grades provide guidance and information about the route and the terrain. We know users of the same equipment can have varying abilities, so we ensure we don’t put people in the same category and consider all possible abilities when reviewing routes.

We work with user groups to design infrastructure such as gates and bridges to be accessible and sympathetic to the environment. For the new Grasmere route, we widened and re-surfaced paths, levelled out gradients, put in barriers on slopes, and added benches to enhance the experience for a wide range of users. The new Sizergh route included creating a whole new section of path to result in a new accessible circular route through woodland.

To allow our routes to be accessible for all we’ve partnered with Tramper hire companies to have these available at the start of the routes. Our new Sizergh route has this facility available.

## Diversity and Inclusion: how has your nominee shown they are committed to highlighting the voices of all disabled people? Has their approach considered supporting disabled people that face other forms of discrimination in society? For example disabled people from Black, Asian, minority ethnic, LGBTQ+, and lower socio-economic backgrounds.

We are committed to engage with disabled people as much as possible when making decisions about the routes. We actively recruit volunteers with accessibility considerations, so we have greater insight into what considerations need to be made. We also host accessibility training sessions with staff and volunteers, to give them an idea of what it might be like for a wheelchair user, and to help them consider the range of abilities different wheelchair users will have.

 This year we focussed on increasing our photography and videography assets to help promote the MWS brand and routes. We wanted our assets to be authentic with real people showing diversity. This included people in wheelchairs, a girl with cerebral palsy, a man with limited walking using a walking aid, and also families from lower socio-economic backgrounds that aren’t familiar with the National Park or don’t know where to start when looking to explore. We also included young families, generational families with pushchairs and little legs, and ethnic diversity.

We continue to grow our bank of assets and plan to engage with disabled and ethnic diverse influencers to help promote our product. In addition, at the Keswick Mountain Festival 2024 we sponsored the Accessibility Zone and funded an accessible toilet for the area. We promoted our MWS routes, allowing us to talk to people from all backgrounds about the routes.

## Lived experience: How has your nominee’s work been informed by the lived experience of disabled people? Are they a disabled person, and/or have they collaborated or co-produced with disabled people?

We work closely with communities and disabled people to make decisions on new routes, the materials to use, and what the gradients should be set as.

The new Grasmere route was initiated by Will, a disabled Grasmere resident, who sought an accessible path he could safely use to see the fells. We were approached by the Grasmere Village Society who requested the new route and worked with them and Will in designing. The village now has an accessible route through the village, linking to the National Trust house, Allan Bank, and accessible views of Helm Crag, a famous Wainwright fell.

We worked closely with National Trust for the new Sizergh route, where comments from people who visited Sizergh Castle identified a need for an accessible route. We worked with disabled people to design the route. The route supports the National Trust's strategy to open up the site to a wider demographic, providing accessible, inclusive routes that are free to access. This has also been part of the opportunity to explore the Lake District by public transport, with bus stops nearby, reflecting that over 1 in 4 households don’t have a car, due to affordability or disability.

For our new photography and videography, we approached local disabled people to feature in our shoots, allowing them to feel empowered.

Our routes are shared with disabled groups such as the disabled ramblers and the Calvert Trust. We will continue to work closely with other groups so more people can benefit from using them.