Member Highlight: Euan's Guide

Audio Transcript

Joe Logue, Euan's Guide: My name is Joe. I'm the Community Manager at Euan's Guide and my job involves traveling in the UK to review disabled access in weird and wonderful places.

Amy Walsh, Inclusion Scotland: For anyone who is not familiar with Euan's Guide, can you tell us a bit about the organisation, its history, its background, why it started, and a bit about the work that you do?

Joe: That's a lot of questions.

Amy: That is a lot at once.

Joe: So Euan's Guide are a disabled access charity based in Edinburgh, but we cover the UK and further afield. We were set up in 2013 by a man named Euan MacDonald, M.B.E.to give him his full title. Euan lived with motor neuron disease for 21 years, and much of his frustrations are the frustrations of disabled people have in going to places and being told we're fully accessible - no such thing - but also finding out that their accessible venue has five stairs in the way in.

So being a disabled person he grew frustrated with the lack of access information available to the public and decided he wanted to change that by creating a platform that allowed people to share their experiences with others.

Amy: Can you tell me a bit about the mission of Euan's Guide?

Joe: So our mission is quite simple. It's to create a more accessible world for disabled people and that's done through every interaction we have with others. Every review that we receive, helps make the world that wee bit more accessible for disabled people in Scotland, United Kingdom, and further afield.

Amy: Inclusion Scotland are really proud to have Euan's Guide as a member. Can you tell us a bit about what being part of that wider network means to your organisation?

Joe: Well, first of all, I just want to say that we are proud to be members! But being part of that wider network makes a massive difference to us as an organisation. Within the whole charity sector, money is massively restricted, massively limited and it seems to be getting a wee bit worse now. So by having organisations we can turn to, we can support their endeavours and in turn to have them support us with the work we do.

One thing that's been really important to us as members of Inclusion Scotland is having access to the intern program. So we've had quite a few people come through Euan's Guide and it's been amazing to work with these people who are just enthusiastic about an inclusive society as we are, but also to see where they've gone to since starting with us. So it's a brilliant partnership to be a part of.

We love the work that you guys do, and we hope you love the work that we do.

Amy: That's great. And it's lovely to hear success stories on the back of the Employment and Internship Programme as well. So, that's really lovely to hear. Thanks.

You manage quite a unique team of people at Euan's Guide. Can you tell us a bit about your team and the work that you do, and why that's important?

Joe: Well, I'd definitely say that everybody who works at Euan's Guide is unique. Everyone's brilliant. But as for the team that I manage, we call ourselves the review crew. There are three of us. And there's myself based in Johnston, just outside Paisley. My colleague Pat, who lives in Glasgow, and my colleague Molly, who stays in London. And between the three of us, we do travel across the entirety of the UK. Pat and I have more of a focus in Scotland, given the fact that we're based here, it's much easier for us to get around. But between the three of us, we travel, as I say, reviewing disabled access and making a difference through that work.

One of the most unique aspects of the role that we do is that our lived experience makes a lasting difference. So even through the places we go to, by leaving our reviews, we can tell people what to expect when they get there. A really unique aspect of our website as well, is that people can filter based on access needs. So I'm a wheelchair user, someone can find reviews from me as a wheelchair user, and understand if a place might work for them.

But I just think there's something amazing about three disabled people being able to use their own lived experience to make a real and lasting change that benefits everyone.

Amy: What is something you're particularly proud of as part of your work with Euan’s Guide?

Joe: I'd have to say the impact overall. So since I started working at Euan’s Guide, my team and I have reviewed over 1000 places across the entirety of the UK, and a bit further afield, that includes around 400 places in Scotland.

By doing the work we do, we’re able to create opportunities for disabled people to find new and interesting places to go to. That's everything from reviewing EV chargers to museums, libraries, and in some cases, even sports centres. I've even had this wheelchair at poolside a couple of times to take pictures.

Amy: The work that Euan’s Guide does is clearly very important. Can you tell us a bit about why that work matters?

Joe: So the work we do is exceptionally important because it creates opportunities for disabled people to have new and positive experiences. Quite often, when I speak to disabled people, who are reluctant to even leave the house because they can't be sure that the place they are going to next is accessible to their needs. And quite often, we'll see venues using phrases like “fully accessible” or even like phrases like “wheelchair accessible” don't even give a direct indication of what a place is like when you're within that building using a mobility device.

So by having a platform, where people can share their experiences, people can find what they are likely to expect when they go to a venue and perhaps, make informed decisions on where they go. But one thing that I always said to the venues is never be the reason that people are wasting their time. So if your information can be provided on Euan’s Guide, or people can talk about their experiences, then it means that

other disabled people will come along and have a positive time while they’re there.

Amy: What are the ways that people could get involved with the work that Euan’s Guide does?

Joe: There's quite a lot of ways that people can get involved with the work we do. Obviously we've spoken about the website, the review aspect of it, which of course is very important, and that gives people the option to do a video or audio and even BSL reviews, if that's something you'd like to do.

But beyond that, we also known for a few other things. So we have a red cord card campaign. If anyone's ever been in an accessible toilet, and they've seen a little card hanging off the emergency cord, that's usually us. I say usually because I've been to a few places that have made their own counterfeit ones, you know, imitation, flattery, all that stuff. So that's another way people can get involved with the work that we do. If they do choose to do that, we'll send out a pack of these cards for free, usually a pack of ten. And by using these cards, we get to make accessible toilets safer for everyone. We've actually issued over 200,000 of these since we started doing it, which is impressive. That's everywhere. Some of the sign ones will be me, by the way. I used to put my initials on them.

But the other way that people can get involved with what we do, is to get involved in our annual access survey. So we'll be announcing that shortly. But it's something we've been doing for the last 12 years, and the survey gives disabled people a way to share their experiences of being a disabled person in Scotland and of course, the UK today. And this includes everything from public transport to attitudes towards disabled people as they stand at the moment, and even just the barriers that you face. This could be things like toilets or the lack of changing places toilets and just the challenges that you may have navigating the world ultimately as a disabled person. But that information is then used

and collated and is made freely available. So you can review that yourself.

Or if you're an organisation trying to make change, you can use that as an example of the change you're looking to make and the impact that these things have on disabled people day to day.

Amy: So when somebody leaves a review on Euan's Guide, can you tell us about what happens after that? What's the process?

Joe: Yeah, there's quite a few things that happen of the back of that. So the first thing is if someone leaves a review, they immediately create an opportunity for a disabled person to find somewhere that might or might not suit their needs. But more than that, they create an opportunity for us to get feedback to venues. We know that not everyone has the confidence, capacity or capability to give direct feedback, but we'll do that for you. And from a recent survey we held, 70% of venues have told us that they've made a lasting change on the basis of feedback given to them through Euan's Guide reviews.

Amy: That's great. So it really does make a big change and changes happen from there.

Can you tell us about some real impactful change that you've been involved in as part of your work?

Joe: This gives me a really good opportunity to share my bridge story. So recently I was in Dundee for an event at the V&A but before I went to the event, I decided I wanted to visit Fife. Now the really cool thing about Dundee is they have the Tay Road Bridge and the Tay Road Bridge is wheelchair accessible, thanks to the lift on the Dundee side. So I made my crossing, had a wee bit of time exploring Newport on Tay, and on the way back I checked the indicator on the Fife side to make

sure the lift was operational. So when I got to the other side, the lift wasn't operational. The interesting thing that happened there was I had to call for assistance.

So got back to the platform, got some staff up and they came up and they gave me three options. The first was that they could carry me, all 14 stone of me, and the equipment down a spiral staircase, which wasn't happening. They could carry my equipment down and I could bum shuffle, it is their words, not mine, down the stairs. Alternatively, we could shut the bridge, so I told them we're shutting the bridge.

Amy: Shut the bridge!

Joe: Definitely, that was happening there. So what we had to do was put some cones out and actually hold the traffic in place on the bridge. So once the traffic was held there, I transferred from my wheelchair to the platform and then back into my wheelchair, only to ride down the carriageway into Dundee which was a pretty unique experience, but because I was reviewing the access of the bridge, I have loads of footage.

So I thought, let's make a video and share what the experience was like. And within a day had a quarter of a million people see that video, which was astounding. But one of those people was obviously the Tay Road Bridge team, and they very promptly reached out to have a conversation about what happened. To their credit, they were very apologetic, but I wanted to see what change could be made to prevent that being an issue in the future. And if someone didn't have the ability to contact staff, they'd had to have made the trip all the way back to Fife to come back over, which I wasn't quite happy with.

So we had a conversation, and my main suggestion was, you need to have a ramp that can be deployed in the case of an emergency there. So a few weeks passed, and they heard back from them, and they did just that. So now the Tay Road Bridge has a ramp that can be deployed in the event of any emergency. And the ramp is actually riveted to the

bridge. So that means it's not this case of butting up against it can actually just be put on the bridge, and it gives people a safe way to exit that. You still have to go via the carriageway, but at the very least that's quicker and means that no one's being carried down three flights of spiral stairs.

Amy: That's incredible. Especially to see real change come from feedback that it's stop anybody else being in the same position again.

Joe: Well, that's the power of lived experience. When you have venues, organisations willing to listen to what disabled people are saying, they'll actually put measures in place that support disabled people. Not everywhere is going to be suitable for everyone, but venues are willing to listen and be receptive. Massive change can happen. And I'd like to think that's an example of that.

Amy: Yeah, absolutely. But also takes that, that person to have the confidence and the support in place to be able to make their review, to give that feedback and to feel confident that their feedback is actually going to be listened to and heard.

Joe, thank you so much for your time today. It's been a real pleasure to speak to you.

Looking ahead for Euan's Guide, what are you most excited about over the next wee while?

Joe: You've asked me the one question that I cannot answer. All I'll say is there's a lot of big changes coming up at Euan's Guide. People will hear a lot more about the work we are doing, and it'll be easier than ever for people to get involved in making that difference to accessibility, as I say within Scotland, the UK and further afield.

Amy: So watch this space.

Joe: That's it. Yeah. Perfect.

Amy: Thank you so much.

Joe: Thanks.