

Game of life



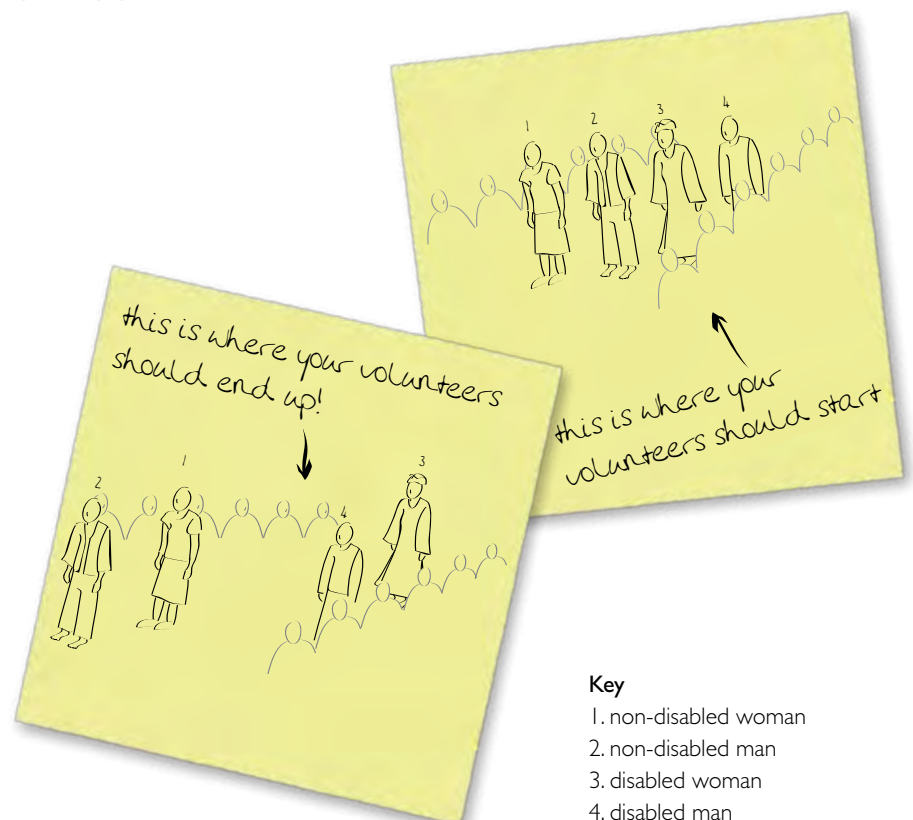
TIME

60 Minutes

Story is a powerful means of conveying your message. And it's used to great effect in this visual representation of discrimination. It helps to reinforce concepts raised.

When the story begins and participants start to think about whether a disabled infant would be as welcome as a non-disabled one, you can talk about some of the prejudices surrounding disability – and some of the causes of this stigma. Throughout the story there are many opportunities for raising issues of concern. So it's helpful if you prepare well by researching local attitudes, beliefs and challenges.

This is the activity where the main point of the training course 'hits home'. People have been transformed by this activity. Having a tea break afterwards is good, as participants often wish to discuss and reflect on the issues raised here with each other, and need a little time for the message to absorb. This can make the final part of the afternoon especially productive.





CRITICAL POINT FOR TRAINER

It's important that people volunteer for their roles.

In some situations, religious or traditional beliefs may preclude some from participating. Be aware and respect that. In some cultures, even to imagine being disabled can be seen as 'tempting fate'.

METHOD

Setting up the room is important. You may need to spend time reorganising the chairs. You'll need enough space for four people to stand side-by-side, with the other participants seated around the edges of the room, facing towards the volunteers. Creating a 'corridor' in the middle of the room, enabling you to use the full length of the room for the exercise, is ideal.

1. Ask for four volunteers from among the group (ideally, two men and two women), willing to stand for about 30 minutes to represent the following groups:

- non-disabled men;
- disabled men;
- non-disabled women;
- disabled women.

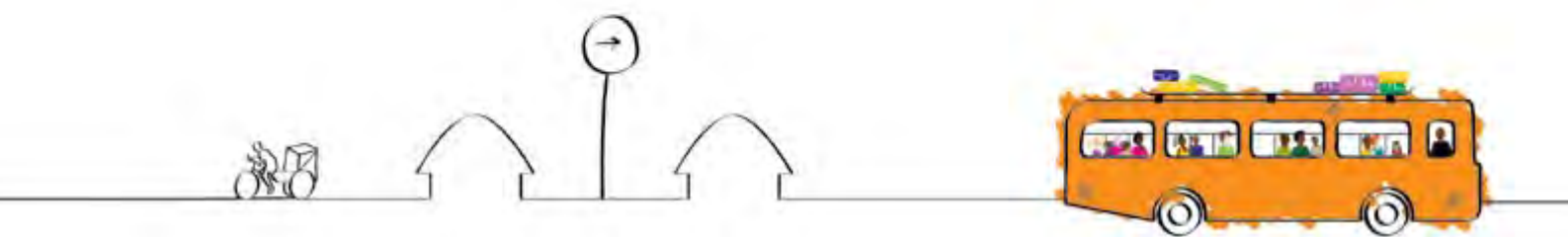
Stress this is NOT a role-play exercise – the volunteers will be representing a group of people from within a village. Many people do not like role-play, hence the need for reassurance!

2. Assign each volunteer a role. Explain how you'll be telling a life story, taking the characters on a journey from birth to old age. As you reach each significant life event, you'll ask them to respond as they think their character (or their family) would react. They'll need to take:

- two steps forward for a very positive or very successful experience;
- one step forward for a positive or successful experience;
- one step back for a not-so-positive or not-so-successful experience;
- two steps back for a negative or unsuccessful experience.

Once your volunteers understand what they'll be required to do, reinforce they are representing a group of people, so they should respond accordingly. Encourage them to avoid thinking about specific impairments or basing decisions on their own life experiences. Also, their response should be based on what they think is currently accurate for their culture and situation – not what it ought to be.

After each life stage and volunteers' responses, allow time for the others to react and comment. If there's disagreement, the group should decide by consensus and the volunteer may be asked to alter their move. The facilitator's role is to assess when to intervene and



comment to clarify reasons for decisions and to bring out and discuss any prejudicial points. The specific impairment is not relevant to the main point of this exercise, so try not to focus on this too much. It won't alter the essence of the activity.

3. **Set the scene for the story.** Since you want to emphasise links between disability and poverty, consider placing the story in a typical village. Describe it in as much detail as you can, explaining that income poverty levels are generally quite high – although most families have land and access to safe water. For entrepreneurs, opportunities exist in the nearby town where there are also health and educational facilities.
4. **Start with the first life event, as if telling a story...**ask for comments and suggestions from the rest of the group.

'One fine day, after a long wait of nine months, your character is born. How does your family feel when they see who you are? Make your moves.'

Note what might happen:

- family is very happy (non-disabled son born), *two steps forward*;
- quite happy (disabled son/non-disabled daughter), *one step forward*;
- not happy (disabled son), *one step back*;
- very unhappy (disabled daughter), *two steps back*.

'Now you are a bit older, and it's time to start thinking about school. How likely is it that you will be able to attend school? Make your moves.'

'Now you are 20. You'd like to get married, or form a relationship. How much do you think this will be possible for you? Make your moves.'

'You like to keep busy and want to make some money for your family. You try to get a job. How easy will it be for you to find one?'

'A few years go by. Everyone in your age group is having babies. How much will this be a possibility for you?'

Check if the disabled woman takes two steps back, or is instructed to do so by the group. Why did this happen? They may say it's because most disabled women are physically unable to have children – a common myth.



PRACTICAL TIP

Game of life can be used as a 'stand alone' activity for groups with limited amounts of time. There's no need to prepare any materials, and it can be run in as little as 30 minutes (ideally, one hour). It has a strong impact on people and always provokes many discussions. So it's ideal if you have limited time to get your message across.



CRITICAL POINT FOR TRAINER

In groups with disabled and non-disabled participants, this activity can have additional sensitivities. So it's really important participants feel comfortable enough with each other to honestly explore the situation from their perspectives. Be aware of this if you are a non-disabled person and it's the first time you've worked with disabled people.

Two steps back may well be an accurate response for a different reason – disabled women often don't have children because society thinks they can't or shouldn't.

'Now you're in your 40s. You have a lot of experience of life. You want to help your community by becoming involved in local politics. How likely are you to achieve this goal?'

5. Ask the group:

- Who is in the best position now? Who is in the worst place?
- Volunteers, how does this make you feel?
- Does any of this surprise anyone?
- Is it helpful as a tool for reminding us that disability and social exclusion seriously affects people's abilities to avoid poverty?
- The non-disabled man at the front of the exercise is regarded as living in poverty – what does this imply for disabled people?

The most powerful way to end this session is to ask the group to look once again at where the characters are standing. Recall that this was all taking place in a rural location where general levels of poverty are quite high. Even though the non-disabled characters are well ahead of the disabled ones, they're by no means wealthy. Ask the group – who benefits from your development programmes at the moment?

MOTIVE

Including disabled people is an important issue for poverty reduction – that's the message of this session. It should help show why they are especially vulnerable to chronic poverty. It also provides you as facilitator with a good opportunity to talk about many different development issues that affect disabled people – but which rarely get discussed.

To many, this session will dramatically reveal things about their communities which they may never have considered before. It can be fun. Humour can take the edge off the hard facts exposed by the game. But some participants can find it distressing, because it makes plain some painful, personal truths.