

The Importance of Accessibility & Inclusivity

by David John Roberts

As the Access and Inclusion Officer, my role is to make our online information and resources – as well as our frontline services – more accessible for people, and make sure that everyone who needs our support feels included.

The Equality Act sets out the [protected characteristics](#) and they are a useful way to think about making our services suitable & relevant to everyone. We often see that these protected characteristics play a big part in people's housing difficulties or homelessness. Many people have more than one characteristic which can make situations even more complicated and put them more at risk. Everybody is different and it's vital for us to consider how we can make our information more valuable, more specific and more accessible.

There is a lot of work to do. When I started, I knew that I couldn't do everything at once. I look at it a bit like growing plants. The ones that need the most water are the ones to prioritise to get them as tall as the others. The first thing I wanted to focus on was race; a big part of that was trying to break through any language barriers. In face-to-face meetings, people often bring friends or family members with them who can translate & support, we also use [Language Line](#). Online it can be more difficult, so I'm really proud of the fact that we've just launched ReciteMe. It's a massive thing because now our website can be accessed in over 150 languages – 80 of those are in audio, which is brilliant.

I also want to make sure people feel confident about finding additional support. We are housing specialists, so there is only so much we can do. We've developed our Ethnic Minority Communities Support Service Map to help make it easier for everyone to get the support they deserve.

We often see that young people and the LGBTQ+ community face discrimination and struggle to find suitable housing, this has always been a priority for us and we're working with schools and youth services to make sure people are informed about their rights and options from a young age.

I've just starting to focus more on disability which includes mental health issues – so it's a really complicated area to cover. I want to focus more on gender as well. There's so much work that needs doing and it's constantly evolving as the world around us changes.



I can't imagine a time when I can say that my job is done. It will never be done as long as there are wars in the world, oppression and exploitation, as long as people in our society face barriers or discrimination for who they are. People are always going to need support and information, and it's my role to get it to them in a way that they can engage with and understand.

There is a feedback form on our website, **we always appreciate feedback from the people who use our services**. Scrutiny is massively important. If something doesn't work or doesn't make sense, we want to be told so the necessary changes can be made. If the way we deliver some of our information or the way we collect information can be insensitive or confusing, it's important to know so that we can find better ways. If there's information missing or someone has suggestions about ways to improve things, we would love to know.

This is a new role and I think it shows how committed Shelter Cymru are to being more inclusive and supporting people effectively. I'm really proud to have the responsibility to carry it out and I'm proud of the work that I've managed to do so far. There is a lot more to do but hopefully as time goes on, Shelter Cymru will become a more and more accessible organisation for people with protected characteristics and people that need support.

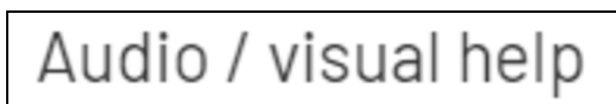
“ Our website can be accessed in over 150 languages – 80 of those are in audio



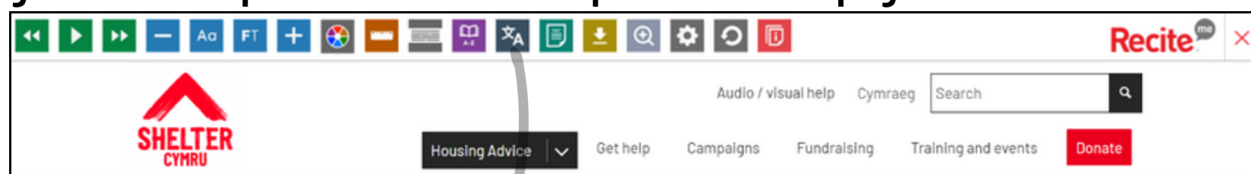
Recite Me is a toolbar that sits on our website and aims to improve the accessibility of Shelter Cymru's online resources. The toolbar has the potential to transform the way people can engage with and digest our online information.

- The language option translates the information into 150 languages and provides audio for many of those.
- The Screen Reader supports people with a visual impairment and people who prefer to listen instead of read.
- The reading support tools include a ruler, screen mask, magnifier, margins, page summariser and dictionary.

This is the launch button:



Clicking on this will open the Tool bar at top of one of our pages:

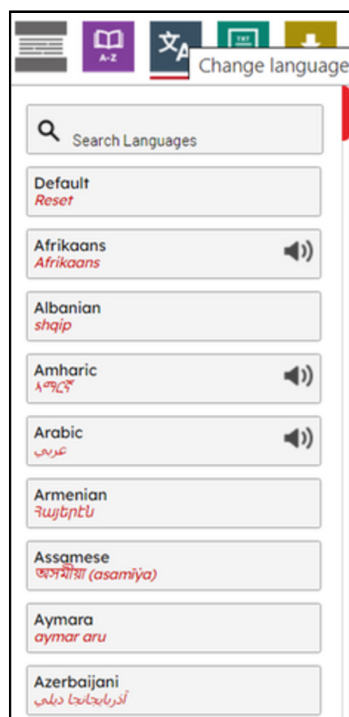


There are MANY options on the toolbar, for a break down please have a look at the [Recite Me User Guide](#), or try things out and see if they work for you.

This the Translation Button:



This will give you a drop down of the languages available (the ones with the audio symbol have an audio option)



When you select a language - (Arabic has been selected below as an example) - all of the text translates immediately. The Recite Me box with the play button allows you to control the audio function to stop, rewind or skip.



We really hope that ReciteMe will help many more people get the help and advice they need.

THE ETHNIC MINORITY COMMUNITIES SUPPORT SERVICE MAP

We have recently launched our Ethnic Minority Communities Support Service Map, which is live on our website [HERE](#).



The map is populated with interactive red dots which represent different services. When you click on a red dot, it will bring up a tooltip containing information on that particular service.

You can zoom in and out of the map to see the locations of different organisations. There is also a drop-down menu of the services, if you find that easier to use than the map function.

We plan to create similar maps in the future, highlighting support services for the LGBTQ+ community, those with disabilities, neurodiversities or advanced learning needs.

If you have any suggestions about services that should feature on any of the maps, please get in touch.



At the beginning of October, My Home Denbighshire will celebrate 2 years of supporting people across the county.

Since it began, the early homelessness prevention project has supported over 400 households, which is over 1000 individuals including more than 350 children.

Almost 80% of the people My Home Denbighshire support live in the Private Rented Sector. Landlord negotiation and mediation is a big part of the project's work. Other vital services include benefit reviews, budgeting and housing advice.

The project is funded by Denbighshire County Council and sees Shelter Cymru working in partnership with Clwyd Alyn and other agencies across the county such as NACRO, TGP Cymru, Working Denbighshire, Talking Points, British Red Cross and BCUHB (Betsi Cadwaladr).

The aim is to work together to end homelessness before it starts

If you or anyone you care about lives in Denbighshire and is worried about their housing situation, please get in touch. Nickkie, Abi and the team are waiting to help.

Call them on 01745 703220,
text 07984 386802 or email
myhomedenbighshire@shelter.org.uk

ASK THE TRAINERS!

Like so many things, the housing sector is FULL of jargon. Shelter Cymru's training department tries to help us all make sense of it.

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF MY LANDLORD WANTS TO INCREASE THE RENT?

This can be complicated as there are different rules for different contracts – **knowing your contract type is really important.** We would always recommend getting advice from our helpline. **Please don't ignore it, if you have been informed of a rent increase but keep paying the original amount, you will get into rent arrears.**

Remember that your landlord cannot change your rent during the fixed term period of your standard contract. As soon as you are in the periodic phase (rolling month to month), your landlord has to give you 2 months' written notice of a rent increase on an [RHW12 form](#). Your rent can only be increased once a year, but there is no limit on how much that increase can be. Any increases *should* be in line with 'market rent' which depends on your area and the property.

It is always worth speaking to your landlord or letting-agent to see if they would accept a smaller increase or introduce the increase in stages. **If you start paying the rent at the new amount, you will be seen as having accepted the rent increase.**

If you moved into your home before 1 December 2022, you might have the right to challenge a rent increase through the [Rent Assessment Committee](#) (RAC). You must do this within 2 months of receiving the notice RHW12 of a rent increase using [this form](#). However, the RAC may set a higher rent if the rent increase would mean you are paying less than other people renting similar properties in your area.



If you moved into your home before 1 December 2022 and your contract contained a 'rent review' clause, your landlord should continue to follow the procedure set out in your original tenancy agreement.

If your rent does increase, please make sure you have checked if you could be getting some financial support from the DWP or from the council [HERE](#).

There is a lot more information on our webpage [HERE](#) and if you aren't sure, please get advice.

DO YOU HAVE A QUESTION FOR OUR TRAINERS? If you do, please email getinvolved@sheltercymru.org.uk and we'll ask the trainers!

Get housing help and advice

- Call Shelter Cymru's urgent [helpline](#) (9am – 4pm Monday to Friday) **08000 495 495**
- Visit our [housing advice](#) pages and find the topic which you need advice on
- Use our [webchat](#)
- Phone or visit a Shelter Cymru [advice centre](#)



Surfing Sofas is a social justice poet and community artist.

He brings a personal history of homelessness, racism, trauma, and mental health to life inspiring audiences online and in person.



You describe yourself on your X-bio as 'just a sofa surfing writer'. Have you always been a writer or do you think it was a response to becoming homeless?

I had an older cousin who was really into rap music. She wrote a rap for herself and me, made me learn it and we recorded it on a little karaoke system. We got cool feedback and I used to pester her to write more for me because I wanted more cool feedback and she never really had the time, she was a teenager she had homework to do and stuff. I wanted her to write more raps for me to say to people and then she basically said that I had to learn myself. So at 7, when my cousin made it clear that she wasn't going to be writing for me, I picked up a pen and made a few bad attempts. Then I discovered a book called Curtis the Hip Hop Cat – it was a rhyming book about a cat who wants to get into break dancing – and when I read that book, it kind of helped me understand rhyming patterns more and since then I've been writing on and off over the years.

In 2013, after surfing sofas for a very long time, I ran out of sofas to surf on and I ended up on a winter night shelter programme – at that time I had pretty much stopped writing – but when I was in the winter nights shelter, I wrote a song about my stay there, about the volunteers and the people that used the shelter too and that was the first thing I ever wrote about homelessness and it kind of spiralled from there.

When did you realise that your writing could influence and educate people about homelessness and have a positive impact?

So after writing the song, I shared it with the lady who used to run the night shelter and she invited me to perform the song at a homelessness awareness event. I performed it and the host of the event came up to me afterwards and she was crying. She hugged me and I could feel the tears from her face on my face and I realised that this song really hit people. I looked at the audience and there was a lot of people crying and I was likewow they really understand what I'm talking about.

I don't think I had intentions to write more about homelessness, but a few months later I started my own grass roots outreach organisation to distribute basic supplies to people who were rough sleeping in London and I made another song about homelessness to fundraise for that and that did quite well and then I started going back into writing poetry. I think it's an easier medium to try and get a point across rather than writing a whole song. You can get more focussed.

I'm still thinking about the woman crying on your cheek, was that OK? Are those kind of responses OK?

It took me by surprise, but it was warming...it was maybe the third time in my life that I had seen people cry to my material, it's pretty welcome, there were no negative feelings. At that time I wasn't the most touchy feely person, but I feel like writing poetry and learning about myself and about other people has turned me into a hugger, I'm a lot more of a hugger than I used to be.

Do you have an underlying hope or message that underpins most of your poetry?

I think maybe the underlying message would be that homelessness is a lot more than complicated than people perceive it to be and that there's a lot more to people experiencing homelessness that we need to understand.

I still think that when the majority of people see a person in the situation of homelessness – especially street homelessness – they just jump to a bunch of conclusions and don't really consider what a person has inside. What kind of wisdom, what kind of talent, they just see homelessness and forget everything else. That's the kind of myth-busting I want to do. People have given so much and still have so much left to give. It's too easy to lay blame and ignore what's brought a person to that point – what experiences, trauma, environment have effected someone. People find homelessness really uncomfortable and the easiest thing to do is jump to negative conclusions, think that someone is a waste of space and move on.

Hopefully your work with the Museum of Homelessness will help you get that message out there. Can you tell us a bit more about your role?

I'd worked with the museum on a couple of projects over the years. In 2022, I was on Arts and Homelessness International Leadership Programme, the museum reached out because they were about to get their own building for the first time and they were looking for 3 people to be artists in residence. They asked if I would be up for being their Poet in Residence and I said, "Sure!", although I never had no idea what it would involve, but it's blossomed into something quite beautiful, if I can say so myself!

My initial plan was to document the journey and process of the museum moving into their new premises but then something sparked in me to put together a spoken word album based on some of the objects they've collected over the years. I wanted to try and express what those objects meant to their original owners and also what they mean to me as a person experiencing them. The pieces I wrote are almost cryptic – but I hope not so cryptic that people can't understand what I'm talking about. They are more interpretations than explanations. Those recordings have been put together with my pieces – it's almost like an audio archive which I really hope people get a lot out of.

Finally, is there one piece that you are most proud of or that you would like people to listen to?

That's really difficult. There are probably two. 'Drugs give Hugs' is the one that a lot people respond to and are moved by. The other one is called 'Flossing Teeth with Hair', which is about a nit comb. It's on the Objects and Concepts album for the museum. Obviously when most people see a nit comb they just see an object to remove lice, but for the bloke who donated it to the museum, that object had so much depth to it and it really touched me.

Surfing Sofas' work is available to listen to on [Soundcloud](#) and [YouTube](#)

For more information about the Museum of Homelessness, please go to their website [Museum of Homelessness](#).



PEOPLE and HOMES

23 October 2024

Wales is in the midst of a housing emergency, with thousands of people currently unable to access a safe, secure, suitable and affordable home. Right now, more than 11,500 people are homeless and trapped in temporary accommodation, almost 140,000 people on social housing waiting lists and tens of thousands more facing the reality of living in a private rented sector that isn't fit for purpose.

Ending this housing emergency is possible and at the heart of doing so is increasing the availability of social homes. Without this ending homelessness in Wales simply won't be possible.

People and Homes 2024 will put social housing at the heart of the discussion. With panels of experts offering insight into the impacts of a lack of social homes, the importance of social homes in addressing issues ranging from homelessness to health and providing views on how we can change the system to increase the numbers of social homes available and end the housing emergency once and for all.

For more information click [HERE](#)

This will be our second hybrid conference which means that you can watch it online. If you are interested, please get in touch.

If you would like to get involved with 2025's conference, let us know. PLANNING HAS ALREADY STARTED!



DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Email getinvolved@sheltercymru.org.uk if you are interested in any of the following:

6 October

Event: Cardiff Half Marathon

11 October

Bucket Collection: Tesco, Pengam Green, Cardiff

23 October

People & Homes Conference

Our annual conference where guest speakers start inspiring conversations

26 October

Event: Marathon Eryri

21 November

Focus Group

Join us online to discuss ways to improve our services so we can help more people.

28 November

Take Notice Virtual Get-Together

Join the Take Notice network online for:

- work on Shelter Cymru's infosheets
- free training on the Equal Grounds Standards

29-31 November

Event: Cardiff Christmas Festival

including Christmas at the Movies

4 December

Newsletter Content Deadline

If you have ideas or content for the December edition of this newsletter, please let us know by 4 December.

5 December

Event: Shelter Cymru Christmas Fayre, Wrexham Rugby Club

6 & 7 December

Bucket Collection: Asda, Coryton, Cardiff

11 December

Bucket Collection: Asda, Rhyl

14 December

Bucket Collection: Wrexham AFC

20 December

Bucket Collection: Asda, Rhyl

20 December

Bucket Collection: Cardiff Central

We're so grateful to our brilliant volunteers, who help to power the fight for home and make a huge difference to the lives of people in housing need across Wales. We exist to defend the right to a safe home, but we can't do it without you.



We stand in solidarity with Grenfell United – the bereaved, survivors and residents, who've already fought for seven years for justice. It's vital the lessons of Grenfell are learnt and we keep fighting so that everyone has access to a safe, secure, suitable and affordable home.

The devastating fire at Grenfell Tower took the lives of 72 people and forever changed the lives of survivors and those who lost loved ones. The fire wasn't inevitable, it could and should have been avoided. Residents of Grenfell had been raising concerns long before that terrifying day in 2017 but, as the inquiry has found, they were at times dismissed as "trouble makers" and their voices went unheard.

If the UK had a legal right to adequate housing, residents would have had a legally enforceable right to take their concerns to court and have their questions answered. Shelter Cymru is part of a campaign calling on the Welsh Government to give us this right in Wales.

It's not enough to just hope that a tragedy like Grenfell never happens again. We owe it to the victims and survivors to ensure that the voices of residents are heard and their concerns are acted on.

Everyone needs a safe, stable, suitable home – the legal right to adequate housing would help to ensure the voices of residents aren't dismissed in Wales.

If you want to learn more about the inquiry, Shelter's policy officer, Sam Bloomer, has written an informative and passionate article [Grenfell Tower Inquiry - Shelter England](#) and the full report is available here [Homepage | Grenfell Tower Inquiry](#).

You can read more about the campaign for the right to adequate housing [HERE](#).

GET INVOLVED WITH SHELTER CYMRU AND JOIN THE FIGHT FOR HOME

- Join Take Notice to work with local authorities to help them understand how to improve their housing services.
- Our Fundraising team organise regular events across Wales to help us raise funds and spread the word about our fight for home. Why not join us?
- We need your help to review our Shelter Cymru Advice Online webpages to make them as accessible, useful and informative as possible.
- We run regular focus groups with people who have used Shelter Cymru services to help us continually improve what we do. We are looking for participants and facilitators to help to run these sessions.
- We are recruiting Peer Researchers to speak to staff, service users and the public to better understand the barriers to housing and inform our campaign work.

To find out more, email getinvolved@sheltercymru.org.uk