



ISPA
Intersectional Stigma
of Place-based Ageing



Flushing Out Accessibility

Toilets Around Perth, Scotland Project

September 2025

In Partnership with



Flushing Out Accessibility, September 2025

FLUSHING OUT ACCESSIBILITY – THE TOILETS AROUND PERTH, SCOTLAND PROJECT

An Accessibility Audit

“It shouldn’t be the case that you feel like a school child again, having to “ask permission” just to use the loo.” (Cindy, ISPA CPR)

Introduction

The ISPA project has consistently highlighted that one of the biggest barriers to accessibility for older and disabled people is something many others take for granted: toilets. Before disabled people can even think about enjoying an event, travelling, or taking part in community life, they face the extra mental load of planning ahead - mapping out accessible routes and checking whether suitable toilets will be available. When that information is missing, outdated, or inaccurate, it creates anxiety and can turn what should be an everyday activity into a major challenge. In short, reliable information about accessible toilets can be the difference between an inclusive or an excluding environment.

On 15th August 2025, ISPA Research Fellow Dr Dianne Theakstone joined a group of ISPA Community Peer Researchers to audit public toilets in Perth, Scotland. This blog follows their journey across three sites, sharing both the audit process and the lived experiences that highlight just how much accessible toilet provision matters for dignity, safety, and inclusion.



Figure 1: A blue and white sign with a person in a wheelchair in a changing places accessible toilet, <https://www.changing-places.org/>

Perth, Scotland

Perth, often known as The Fair City, is a historic and vibrant place located on the banks of the River Tay, in the heart of Scotland. Although today it is a small city with around 47,000 residents, Perth once played a very important role in Scotland's history. For many centuries it was a key centre of trade, politics, and religion.

In medieval times, Perth was in effect the capital of Scotland. Just a short distance from the city lies Scone Palace, the historic site where Scottish kings were crowned on the Stone of Destiny. The city is also home to one of Scotland's oldest surviving churches, St John's Kirk, which has been at the centre of community life for hundreds of years.

Geographically, Perth sits in Perthshire, an area often called "Big Tree Country" because of its beautiful woodlands and landscapes. The nearby Kinnoull Hill offers panoramic views over the River Tay, Scotland's longest river and an important natural resource for the region.

Today, Perth continues to thrive as a cultural and economic hub. It has a strong agricultural heritage and is surrounded by fertile land that produces much of Scotland's food. The city also invests in the arts, with venues such as Perth Concert Hall and the newly redeveloped Perth Museum helping to keep its rich history and culture alive.

Meet the Group



Figure 2: Dianne Theakstone, Cindy, Evander & Sheila

Cindy and Evander are ISPA Community Peer Researchers (CPRs) as well as Trustees with Centre for Inclusive Living Perth and Kinross (CILPK), an ISPA project partner. Both Cindy and Evander self-identify as disabled. Accompanying them on the audit trail was Sheila Mackay, CILPK Manager. Together, they regularly support and advocate for disability rights issues at local and national levels.

What are the Challenges

Setting off for our toilet audit, Cindy and Evander outline what they see as the main challenges in finding accessible toilets in Perth, along with their hopes for the day. We began by looking at the locations of accessible toilets listed by Perth & Kinross Council, which according to their 2023 update, shows only six accessible toilets in Perth.



Figure 3: A map of Perth, Scotland showing the location of public and comfort scheme toilet locations

“Accessible toilets (or the lack of them) are one of my biggest bugbears – There never seems to be one when you’re absolutely bursting. On top of that, I’ve noticed some places swapping out the RADAR key locks for other kinds, which really leaves people caught short. The audit felt like a chance to flush out these issues and highlight where improvements are needed.” (Cindy, CPR)

“For people who need accessible toilets or quick access to a toilet, it really can dictate when and where you can go to places. I have a urinary catheter, and it gives me an extra option when toilets are not available...but it shouldn’t really be something you have to do as a disabled person because not enough toilets are available!” (Evander, CPR)

The Toilet Around Perth Project

CILPK members identified that accessibility standards of public toilets around Perth can vary, and in response, launched *The Toilets Around Perth Project*, which is running June 2025 - March 2026. The aim is to identify, map, and evaluate public toilet facilities across Perth, Scotland, improving access to information and encouraging upgrades and maintenance where needed. By project completion, the group are looking to:

- Create a comprehensive, accessible map of all public toilets in Perth
- Review each facility for cleanliness, accessibility, and features (baby change, disabled access, etc.)
- Identify areas lacking public toilet access
- Engage the community for feedback and awareness
- Propose improvements to local authorities where necessary

Another organisation, PAMIS (Promoting a More Inclusive Society), which promotes the roll-out of Changing Places standard toilets, has provided materials which enable individuals and groups to audit their local toilet facilities. To capture experiences and observations during audits, CILPK set up an online survey, which can be accessed through a QR code or on their website.



Figure 4: *Toilets Around Perth Campaign (publicity poster) with QR code, Centre for Inclusive Living, Perth*

The data collected can be shared with Perth and Kinross council in the form of a recommendations report, and with other accessibility initiatives such as Euan's Guide. PKCIL plan to produce an interactive Toilet Map of Perth, a summary report, and community feedback data.

The Toilets

We visited three toilets, two of which are not on the Perth & Kinross Council map but are accessible toilets. Perth has still very few accessible toilets. The line-up of toilets included Perth Train Station, Perth Bus Station and Perth Library and the group have made some observations for each.

Perth Train Station Toilet

Whilst the train station had accessible toilets the group had some additional comments:



Figure 4: Cindy testing out accessibility of the toilet and signage

- Heavy doors with push buttons were difficult to operate and use
- Flush buttons positioned high were difficult to reach
- A 'not every disability is visible' signage was present.

Perth Bus Station

Despite the council's website identifying an accessible toilet at the bus station, no accessible toilet existed and access to the building was generally difficult:

- Stepped entrances to amenities, such as the waiting-room and café pose an access barrier for many disabled travelers
- Uneven pavement surfaces also pose trip/fall hazards
- There is nothing to suggest an alternative accessible toilet at another location.



Figure 5: Cindy & Dianne at the bus station

"I was genuinely surprised (and more than a little peeved!) to discover there wasn't an accessible toilet at the bus station. Instead, it seems to have been repurposed into some kind of storage room. It would be a huge relief - literally and figuratively - to see this facility reopened and back in action." (Cindy, CPR)

"It's extra difficult at the bus station though because I don't think there is any bus that I can use a toilet on - It's a shame how used you get to things not being available." (Evander, CPR)

Perth Library

The accessible toilet at the library was quite spacious, however, there are still a number of points identified by the group:

- No longer requires a Radar key
- The snib-lock is small and challenging for those with grip difficulties
- Poor signage
- High flush button positioning was noted as a concern
- High toilet roll holder created a challenge for visually impaired users (easily missed).



Figure 6: Library signage and Evander accessing the toilet

“Its location can be tricky to work out — there is only one accessible toilet, and you have to enter the corridor for the gents' toilets to get to it. I had assumed for a long time that there was an equivalent one in the ladies' toilets but there isn't. People will be wary at having to enter the corridor for the gents' even though the accessible toilet door is located before you enter the gents' toilets.” (Evander, CPR)

“I didn't know there was an accessible loo in the library, before our visit. I would tend to ask if there's anyone to ask, where the accessible toilet is.” (Cindy, CPR)

Reflections from the Day

The exercise identified some interesting results and highlighted the ongoing challenges for disabled people in finding and using accessible toilets, including out of date information, limited opening times and building accessibility. Here are some reflections from our audit group:

“It has been quite enlightening that you realise there are actually still issues in many of the accessible toilets.” (Evander, CPR)

“I found the whole experience one of the most enjoyable ‘outings’ we’ve had in a wee while (pun very much intended). All in all, it was a constructive day that helped us get to the bottom of some important issues!” (Cindy, CPR)

“I think toilet access is something that non-disabled people don't realise they take for granted and that it's a double whammy for people who need accessible toilets but also more urgent access to a toilet.” (Evander, CPR)

"Spending time with some of our trustees on the project was a real highlight! Together we had great conversations, carried out a really useful facilities audit, and most importantly, shared plenty of laughs, ideas, and knowledge along the way." (Sheila, CILPK Manager)

This audit made clear what ISPA research has consistently shown: toilets are not a minor detail but a major accessibility barrier. When facilities are hard to find, poorly designed, or simply absent, they restrict disabled people's ability to participate fully in community life. Every outing then carries an extra mental load of planning, mapping, and compromise - a hidden burden that others rarely see.

Yet the day in Perth also showed the strength of lived experience in driving change. The CPRs brought sharp insights and real-world perspectives that exposed gaps but also pointed to practical solutions. Their voices remind us that accessible toilets are not a special provision, they are a basic requirement of dignity, safety, and equality.

Projects like *Toilets Around Perth* highlight the urgent need for accurate information and better facilities, but they also model how inclusion can be built: by listening, acting, and ensuring that no one is left behind simply because they need the loo.

Further Information

If you would like to participate in the Toilets Around Perth project, you can access audit form via the following link: [Google form and review](#)

If you are reading this and you would like to apply for funding alongside this campaign for a changing places toilet then [click here to Inspiring Scotland](#).

Non-profits and small businesses can apply for project costs, and up to £10,000 in development costs, associated with building a Changing Places Toilet.

The aim of the Fund is to increase the number of Changing Places Toilets in Scotland and so meet the human rights of disabled people who cannot use a standard accessible toilet.

The Fund is focused on areas which have limited provision of Changing Places Toilets. The application deadline is Monday 20th October at 12pm (midday).

For further information, please contact CILPK on:

Email: info@cilpk.org

Website: [Centre for Inclusive Living Perth & Kinross](https://www.cilpk.org.uk/)

Bibliography:

Changing Places <https://www.changing-places.org/>

Centre for Inclusive Living <https://www.cilpk.org.uk/>

Pamis <https://pamis.org.uk/site/uploads/Changing-Places-Toilets-Estimates-of-potential-Users-Research-Report-2009.pdf>

Perth & Kinross Council (2023) <https://www.pkc.gov.uk/article/17661/Map-of-public-toilets-and-comfort-schemes>

Intersectional Stigma of Place-Based Ageing (ISPA) Project

The ISPA project is an ambitious 5-year participatory mixed method study that will explore and understand how the stigma attached to where people live can intersect with experiences of disability and ageing. This will provide nuanced insights into the structures and systems that drive exclusion and allow us to tackle the inequalities experienced by older disabled adults. Do visit <https://www.youtube.com/@ispaproject> for an audio and visual overview.

We aim to develop interventions related to home and environmental modifications that encourage interventions for inclusive approaches within housing, health and social care delivery. This in turn supports people to age well within homes and communities across England, Scotland, and Wales. The project is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (Ref: ES/W012677/1) and runs from September 2022 to September 2027.

The Intersectional Stigma of Place-Based Ageing (ISPA) Project is a collaboration between the University of Stirling and the University of St Andrews, Newcastle University and University of Bristol. We are also partnered with the Housing Learning and Improvement Network (Housing LIN) and Scottish Federation of Housing Associations (SFHA).

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