FAIR's Easy Read Service

The quality of life for many people with learning disabilities is reduced because they don't have access to information they can understand. This can also be true for young people, those with limited reading skills, and people who do not speak English as their first language.

The Equality Act
Public authorities have a duty to promote equality and eliminate discrimination. This means they have a duty to provide accessible information.

FAIR Ltd (The Family Advice & Information Resource) has over 20 years of experience as providers of accessible information. We produce Easy Read materials on subjects like health, benefits, and changes to the law. We use simple language and clear illustrations to make information easier to understand.

We have produced Easy Read materials for

- The Scottish Government
- NHS Lothian
- The Disability Rights Commission
- The Mental Welfare Commission
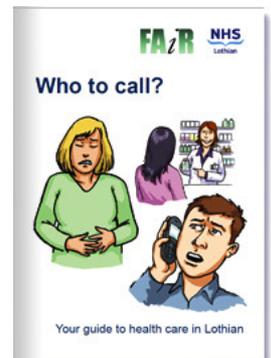
We can help make your information output accessible to people with learning disabilities and their carers.

To discuss the best way to help get your message across and for a free quote, contact:

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Visit our website: www.fairadvice.org.uk

FAIR and Easy Read

FAIR was set up by parents and carers in the early 1990s to provide information and advice to people with learning disabilities and their carers in Edinburgh. An important part of this service was supplying people with Easy Read information.

FAIR follows general guidelines set down by SAIF (The Scottish Accessible Information Forum) and MENCAP on how to make documents more accessible to people with learning disabilities.

Easy Read principles

Easy Read is about making written information easier to understand. This means short, simple sentences (no more than 20 words) and pictures.

Easy Read documents are used to make information more accessible to people with learning disabilities. They can also be useful for people with other communication difficulties including:

- Young people

- People who find reading difficult for other reasons

- People who do not have English as their first language

No Easy Read document will meet the needs of everyone who has difficulties in reading and understanding written information. However, Easy Read documents can:

- let some people access information by themselves

- be a useful tool for support workers when working with individuals or groups

- help people to make their own choices.

Is Easy Read the same as Plain English?

Applying the rules of Plain English to a document makes it easier to read, but it is different to preparing Easy Read. You can rewrite a document line-by-line in Plain English which is a great help for a general audience, but that is still not helpful to an audience with low or no literacy.

Do I have to get everything from my 500-page report into the Easy Read document?

What are the really important messages for this audience from your report? Is it the conclusions? Is it the section that deals with learning disability services? This is what should appear in the Easy Read document.

Does one size fit all?

Someone originally from another country may not be familiar with certain terms, abbreviations or acronyms that are used here. Yet using terms that they may be more familiar with may cause confusion for someone with a learning disability. While no publication will suit every intended reader, it is important to consider your main audience and test your publication with them.

Preparing adapted text

If you are preparing an Easy Read version of an existing document, read the publication with the particular audience in mind to figure out what the main messages of interest to them are. Is there anything missing from the original document that needs to go into the Easy to Read, e.g. is there a helpline / advocacy service that will help people to understand this information? Do you need to tell the audience about your organisation and its role?

Create a clear structure that will get your messages across as quickly and clearly as possible, starting with the most important information and ending with contact details of where to get more information.

Think about the length of your document. Many people with low literacy skills can be intimidated by a print publication. Text that requires only a glance from a proficient reader may require some figuring out for this audience.

Using pictures

- Use clear, simple, uncluttered images that make the subject clear at a glance to a reader.

- Re-use images as often as possible to highlight the same idea.

- Some readers will not understand conceptual images, for instance, a light bulb to represent an idea.

- Avoid using maps. Show a photo of the place instead and give directions for finding it.

- Be aware that some people have trouble distinguishing foreground from background so remove objects/people that are not relevant.

- Make sure images are high quality – photos are in focus and not pixelated

- Make sure images are large enough so that they can be clearly seen and recognised

- Make sure that images can be photocopied more than once and remain clear

- Place images next to the text that they are associated with. Do not place them too close to text that they are not associated with, to avoid confusion.

- Never use a picture as a background to the text as this will make it difficult for people to read the text and understand the image.

Easy Read Graphics - why we use illustrations

A picture "speaks a thousand words" and so a graphic can be an enormous help to people in an Easy Read document. There are three possible kinds of graphics –symbols, photos and illustrations.

Symbols

It has been our experience that symbols can be useful when dealing with very simple ideas and information (disabled toilets, no smoking signs etc) but are less useful when dealing with complicated ideas.

There is no standardised symbol system and different groups might be familiar with different symbols. An effective illustration will be understood by all groups of people.

Photographs

Good quality, high resolution photographs can be very effective when depicting a specific place, person or activity, but can become less effective when depicting complicated ideas or subjects that don't lend themselves to photography. In many cases, an illustration can portray an idea or subject that might be too distressing if seen in a photograph – eg, medical procedures, hate crimes, subjects relating to abuse, etc.

Photographs can often become blurred, pixelated or hard to "read" if they're photocopied badly or resized. Poor quality photographs can make a document unattractive and less appealing to readers.

Illustrations

FAIR employs a graphic artist who produces clear, simple illustrations in a variety of formats – black & white line drawing, greyscale or full colour. Illustrations can be made to order for any subject, which saves time searching through symbol sets or image libraries, or the time taken to find or take an appropriate photo.

Converting documents to Easy Read - step-by-step process

1. After giving a quote to the client, agreeing costs and getting the green light to start work, we look at the text of the original document. We identify difficult words, overlong sentences and complicated ideas that will need explanation.

2. We write a first Easy Read text draft based on the following principles:

    • Sentences should be no more than 20 words in length

    • Difficult words and jargon will be replaced with more familiar words. If difficult terms have to be included, we will explain them.

    • We aim for a document that is no more than 24 pages long, if possible. Any text that is irrelevant and unhelpful for people with learning disabilities will be cut.

3. We add illustrations to support the text. These could be taken from our extensive library of existing illustrations if appropriate, or drawn from scratch by our graphic artist if necessary.

4. If the client is happy with the first draft, we will move on to the next step. If the client is not happy with the first draft text or illustrations, we will ask them to suggest changes and prepare a new draft.

5. We test the text with one or more of our volunteers who have learning disabilities. If this doesn't throw up any issues, we move on to the next step. If there are problem areas, we will prepare a new text draft based on the results of testing.

6. If no further changes are required and the client is happy with the final draft, we deliver the final files to the client or liaise with printers if necessary.