

Speech by Anthony Ford-Shubrook at the Global Disability Summit, 24 July 2018

I went to an inclusive primary school where I made lots of friends. After leaving primary I had to move house in order to be in the catchment area of an accessible school. This made it hard for me to stay connected to my old friends, and at secondary school I found it harder to make new ones.

After secondary school, I had to take my preferred sixth form college to court as my wheelchair was deemed a health and safety risk. Once again, just getting my education was a challenge, and I had to fight for what is supposed to be a right for every young person in the UK. But in doing so I changed the law for others, and now every disabled student has a chance to go to the school or college of their choosing.

My experience at university was a great relief to me. My university lecturers worked hard to make sure I had access to lectures, and living on campus was an empowering experience. For my third year dissertation, I travelled to a township near Johannesburg. I was undertaking research on the education available for children with disabilities. What I found didn't surprise me: many children were not even going to school, and those who did, received poor education. I found that many children were isolated because of the lack of transport, as well as cultural and religious beliefs that kept them in their home.

Since leaving university I have become a UN young leader, which has allowed me to travel internationally and speak at events, raising the profile of disability, hoping that my experiences will help others. Now at AbleChildAfrica, I am further campaigning for the rights and voices of children with disabilities to be included. Many children with disabilities across Africa are isolated and neglected. Our partners empower children and give them a great start in life. Our projects ensure children with disabilities are going to inclusive schools, get engaged in inclusive sports, and benefit from health care.

As my experience shows there is stigma and ignorance both in the UK and in Africa. Though the problem is more challenging in Africa. It is not just infrastructure but attitudes that we need to work to change.