

■ MY CHALLENGES / Part 1 of 4

# Bermuda should be more accessible

So many of the things most of us take for granted — taking a bus or a cab, stepping onto a sidewalk, going to the beach, entering a restaurant — can be tough if not impossible if you're in a wheelchair

*Bermuda might be paradise for some, but for the physically challenged, it can be anything but. We're still way behind the times when it comes to accessibility to buildings and public transportation. Daniella-Jade Lowe, a student at Berkeley Institute, spent several weeks in the Bermuda Sun's newsroom during the summer break. She has written a series of articles aimed at enhancing understanding of the physically challenged, breaking down stigmas and — hopefully — persuading decision-makers that they need to do more. Here, in her first article, Daniella-Jade writes about access and transportation.*

**A**s a 16 year old who has spent most of my life in a wheelchair, I feel that Bermuda is way behind when it comes to accessibility. If I were to rate the level of accessibility from 1-10 in Bermuda, I would probably give it a four, because we do not have many laws in place to outline and reinforce this issue.



**DANIELLA-JADE LOWE**

Guest columnist

Sometimes, I feel that some people look down on us and underestimate our ability as a result of our disability. Even though I have seen some improvements, there is still a lot of work to be done.

I feel that all buildings such as schools, museums, restaurants, hotels, guesthouses and other public places should be made accessible with ramps, elevators and flat surfaces for all wheelchair users and seniors. I can remember the last time I went to my sister's favourite restaurant and my daddy had to lift me in my wheelchair up all of those steps. All buildings should also be made with an easy access escape route in case of a fire.

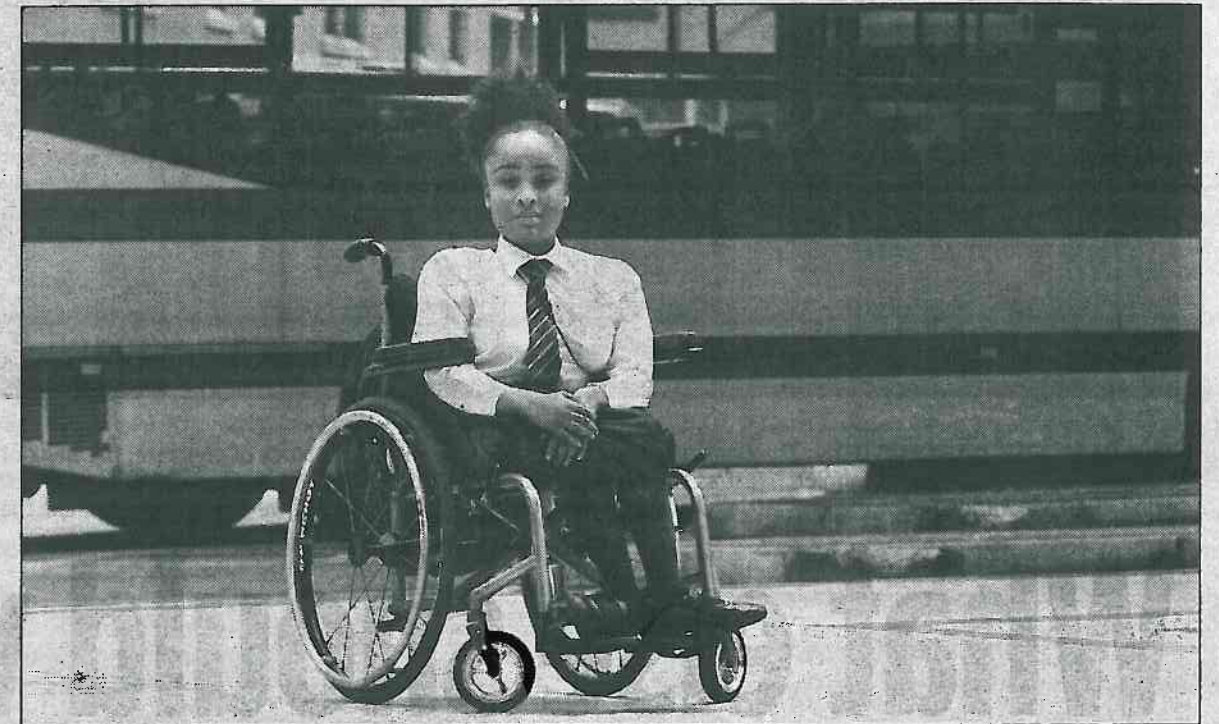
I feel very strongly that there is much more to be done. The public transport system needs work as well. Here in Bermuda there is

only one special bus that transports the physically challenged citizens around Bermuda. There are currently no wheelchair accessible pink and blue buses.

I can remember being in primary five and going on field trips. Whenever our class went on a field trip we would catch the bus to and from our destination. In order for me to get on the bus, my Para educator would have to lift me out of my wheelchair onto the bus, and fold my wheelchair to carry it on to the bus. There aren't very many accessible taxis around here either. Bermuda needs a major change in its infrastructure as far as accessibility is concerned.

My family are very supportive of me and they worked together to help me get a bike that is specially modified for people in wheelchairs, which means that I can be independent without having to rely on the buses. I don't let my disability hinder me from doing things that I want to do. Every Saturday I am able to go to the Grotto Bay tennis court and play wheelchair tennis with my teacher and other wheelchair users.

Another issue is the public beaches. Whenever I go to the beach my father lifts me out of my wheelchair and carries me to the water because it is difficult to manoeuvre the wheelchair on the rough sand. Even though I am not



■ PHOTO BY RAS MYKKAL

**NO BUS TO CATCH:** Our pink and blue buses are off-limits to wheelchair user like Daniella-Jade Lowe.

a beach person, I feel that there should be beach wheelchairs available in small beach stores to rent just because they are a lot easier to push on the sand. Another great thing about these beach wheelchairs is that they can also be pushed into the ocean.

Sidewalks are another issue. Despite the minor change in the incline of the sidewalks, not all of them are ramped or inclined at all. When I go around town, sometimes I find it a bit difficult to transfer from the road to the next sidewalk without assistance because some of these sidewalks are not made with ramps.

These aren't issues that just affect me. They affect seniors and

every physically challenged person in Bermuda and every physically challenged tourist that comes here expecting to be treated the same way as they are at home.

I am very pleased with the Government initiatives that have taken place in the past such as the 'Brown Bag Lunch' that Dr. Ewart Brown organized at the start of his term as Premier. Also the 'Access Week' initiative that Minister Dale Butler spoke at. I have also seen some very impressive outlines that the Ministry of Planning has put together for the future architecture of buildings in Bermuda.

I feel that Bermuda needs to

raise the standard of public accessibility in the way that public buildings are constructed. If everywhere is wheelchair accessible then it will promote more independence for physically challenged people and enable them to get around freely in our community. I hope that everyone who reads this article will put themselves in our position and work to make things better. ■

**WHAT DO YOU THINK?** E-mail feedback on this article to editor Tony McWilliam: [tmcwilliam@bermudasun.bm](mailto:tmcwilliam@bermudasun.bm). Next week: What it's like to attend school in a wheelchair.