Introduction

I researched resources for people with disabilities that have information regarding what airlines and airports must provide for them by law in the USA. Most resources have similar information and the same intentions to inform people with disabilities of their rights. Much of this information focuses on the Air Carrier Access Act (ACAA), and a big (and relatively recent) addition to it is the requirement that airline websites be accessible as well. This addition may make some of these other resources I’ve found unnecessary, but it just goes to show that there are groups who are trying to mak sure that air travel is accessible to all.

References

The Department of Transportation (DOT) has a page on their website under the Aviation Consumer Protection section detailing where travelers with disabilities can find information regarding their rights, how to get assistance if they need it, and comprehensive guides to a variety situations that may arise. The perspective of the resource is that of a government agency that is obliged to ensure that airlines and airports conform to laws made about accomodations. While that is what they do; they’re not an advocacy group so they only really provide what the law requires them to provide, though all of their regulations and are in line with the ACAA.

<https://www.transportation.gov/individuals/aviation-consumer-protection/traveling-disability>

The Muscular Distrophy Association (MDA) is an advocacy group for people with neuromuscular disease and their families. They have compiled a list of links to the pages of disability information for all major airlines that operate in the USA, as well as a link to a “Fact Sheet” about ACAA. The MDA have even included information about the DOT’s rules and regulations governing the airline industry’s application of ACAA. As an advocacy group, they are interested in making sure that airlines continue to abide by the regulations that ACAA inspired.

<http://cqrcengage.com/mda/accessibleairtravel?0>

The Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) has a page on their website detailing facts and myths about ACAA, a brief description of the history of ACAA, information about the DOT’s ACAA hotline, and a summary of the rules and regulations that the ACAA has set forth. As an advocacy group for American veterans who have become disabled, PVA is trying to keep veterans (and anybody who needs the information) informed about their own rights and how they can keep the airlines honest in maintaining the rules.

https://pva.org/research-resources/tips,-tools-resources/travel-tips/

Class Connections

Naturally, my first thought regarding the necessity of ACAA in the first place is that airlines had a very ableist perception of their customers. The airlines took it for granted that everybody had the ability to use their services. Guidelines like those laid out would have been unnecessary if the air travel industry had been sensitive to the needs of everyone from the getgo. Considering the ability to travel and move freely is a right, it was basically infringing on their rights to live life as they saw fit before the ACAA obliged airlines to accomodate people with disabilities. Their disabilities did not keep them from using the airline services, it was the poor design of aircraft and airport amenities that kept people with disabilities from flying.

Reflection

I was under the impression that the airline industry had always had accomodations for people with disabilities, because it seemed like an obvious addition to the structure of a business as far as increasing revenue. If nobody is excluded, then you can have customers from any segment of society. In hindsight, it was naive to think that that might have motivated the airlines to do the right thing and accomodate everybody. Being this class has kind of shown me how callous some organizations can be regarding access, and things that I had taken for granted have been shown to me to not be the case. My thinking never changed, I just became aware of a problem.

Closing

Disability doesn’t seem to me to be a tool of innovation, it seems more like a goal to reach; something to consider while innovating. Obviously,they didn’t have accomodation of all people in mind when designing the first commercial airliners and they needed a redesign later one to rectify that earlier mistake. Disability does offer new challenges and may inspire new innovations and designers should rise to that.