

NEW WRITING

People with learning disabilities can be professionals too

John Tattersall



I am a parent with a learning difficulty. I have one child, he is in foster care (taken away by a system that doesn't understand people with learning difficulties and learning disabilities). I started at CHANGE* as a

volunteer in May 2006. I found about CHANGE at a conference to do with parents with learning disabilities. I was a volunteer for 8 months – I helped write a section of a pregnancy book about the experience of fathers with learning disabilities. I take part in training for parents with learning disabilities and in drama presentations at conferences.

In January 2007 I got a job at CHANGE. My job is co-ordinating the sexuality project. We are researching what sexuality and relationships support and education is available to people with learning disabilities. I think this is very important as I believe that all people with learning disabilities have an equal right to have relationships. As part of my job I co-run a drama group for young people with learning disabilities, I speak and run workshops at conferences around the country, and soon I will be interviewing parents of people with learning disabilities. We will also make an accessible report about what we find out.

Summary

John Tattersall gets two powerful arguments into this short article. The first is that working people who have learning difficulties should not suffer a 'glass ceiling' that keeps them in boring factory jobs. The second is that people with learning difficulties, like John himself, have a right to love and sexual relationships.

My name is John Tattersall. I have a learning difficulty and I am the Sexuality Project Co-ordinator on a research project looking at sex and relationships for people with learning disabilities. The project is based at CHANGE, a national organisation that fights for the rights of people with learning disabilities.

I think it is important for people with learning disabilities to have good jobs because it can help boost confidence and self-esteem. The project I am involved in is about young people with learning disabilities and their right to have a sexual relationship if they want to, without people stopping them. I work 4 days a week. I help run a drama group of young people as well as taking part in conferences around sex and relationships.

I work with my co-worker doing drama work with young people aged 16 to 25 and we help build their self-esteem and confidence. Drama is better than sitting round a table talking about sex. The young people can act out a scene using

characters and props, rather than talking about their personal life openly, which can be embarrassing. We do drama with young people to try to get them to tell us about the main issues that concern them. Young people with learning disabilities find it hard to talk about sex so drama is easier and fun.



Drama is better than sitting round a table talking about sex

I think that everyone has a right to have a sexual relationship, including young people with learning disabilities, and no one should stop them. Some parents should change their attitudes and let their son or daughter have a relationship because they have a right to love and be loved by someone. Society has a very Victorian view of people with learning disabilities so this has to change and we hope to help make that change through our work. Young people have made new friends as a result of the sexuality project. They can be themselves and they have the freedom to talk about the issues that concern them.

The thing I have got from the sexuality project is job satisfaction. I love my job and I love working for CHANGE. I have not done work like this before. In fact it is very different because most of my other jobs have been factory jobs/production work which is quite boring and repetitive. I was also very unhappy with factory work because I was bullied. I feel I am treated with a bit more respect now. I am a professional and people, such as social workers, look up to me now, instead of down at me.



***CHANGE**

CHANGE is a national rights organisation led by disabled people. We campaign for equal rights for all people with learning disabilities. We raise awareness of the issues.

CHANGE is at the forefront of employing people with learning disabilities to develop and run its projects. Paid on equal scales to non-disabled staff the experience and expertise of the learning disabled workers supports CHANGE to continue to develop as an exemplary rights organisation.

Website: www.changepeople.co.uk