



Equal Equality – Toyah’s version

Background

‘Historically society has always segregated disabled people to varying extents, often unintentionally’ says Toyah Wordsworth, founder of the social enterprise ‘Equal Equality’. It is this segregation which Equal Equality hopes to decrease and even eliminate, through providing disability awareness training to pupils at secondary schools in Doncaster.

Toyah started Equal Equality because she was shocked by the negative change in people’s attitudes towards her when she was diagnosed with the progressive disorder Friedreich’s Ataxia at the age of 13 and her mobility began to deteriorate. She wants to prevent other disabled people from going through similar experiences by educating young people about disability.

Toyah was previously employed as a disability equality trainer for businesses, and it was after gaining experience in this job that she decided to go self-employed. She used the greater freedom this gave her to adapt her training for secondary school aged children and started running sessions in school in addition to continuing to work with businesses. Toyah says; **‘Children are the future. By the time people enter the workplace their opinions are often set and hard to change.’**

That is why Toyah has decided to turn her focus to working with schools. If attitudes towards disability (or any prejudice in fact) are going to change, then children need to be made aware of the issue while they are young and more open to weighing up new ideas. Toyah also hopes that as young people talk to their parents about their days at school, parents will also receive some of this training through their children.



PROFILE IN BRIEF

Equal Equality

Services offered:

- Disability training in schools and businesses in Doncaster

Who do you work with?

- Young people and adults, both disabled and non-disabled.

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Responding to a Need

Toyah and the team of volunteers at Equal Equality see an increasing need for disability awareness training among young people as the Government continues to close special schools and focus on integrating disabled students into mainstream secondary schools.

She observes that people are often not aware of the way disabled people are segregated or the different challenges they face unless they are personally affected by disability in their own lives or the lives of a loved one. Thus disability awareness training is needed to help ensure the integration of disabled students into mainstream secondary schools works as smoothly as possible. This is to help both disabled students adjust to finding their place in a mainstream school, and to help non-disabled students know what to say and how to interact with them.

Toyah was at a mainstream school when she became disabled and found that teachers and school friends suddenly had lower expectations of her, talked down to her, or just didn't know what to say. This is why she believes disability equality training is so important, and this is where Equal Equality can help. Toyah gives the pupils she works with an evaluation form after sessions and always gets good feedback. The feedback comments on how informative, helpful, relevant, interactive and enjoyable the sessions were. One student commented 'it left me thinking' and that is what Toyah aims to do.

The sessions involve making young people aware of the challenges disabled people face, what language to use when talking to disabled people in order to remove the common fear of offending disabled people (which sometimes prevents others from trying to communicate with them), and playing with Toyah's own invention 'Removing Barriers'. This is a board game Toyah designed to teach pupils about disability issues. She has received funding to get it made professionally and hopes to sell the game to raise funds for Equal Equality. Toyah also delivers this training to

businesses in the area, and has contracts to train carers in a couple of care home groups. 'Removing Barriers' goes down well with adults too!

Engaging with the Community

When Toyah left college she struggled to find a job despite her good qualifications. She said she didn't realise how hard it would be to find a job as a wheelchair user without any work experience.

She started volunteering for three organisations: YWCA as a admin worker, SCOPE as a mentor for other disabled people, and SYCIL (South Yorkshire Centre for Inclusive Living) who trained her as a disability equality trainer. Toyah found that volunteering for these organisations was tiring but worthwhile as it was the springboard into employment. Toyah still volunteers with SCOPE, using her own experiences to guide others through their journey with disability. She wants to help them 'reach whatever goals they want to reach' and after five years still really enjoys being able to help others in this way.

Toyah currently has five volunteers working with her but needs more- both disabled and non-disabled people. She would like to see lots more disabled people volunteering across the sector. Toyah says; **'Volunteering is great work experience, provides opportunities for disabled people to socialise more, and helps to develop confidence and higher levels of self-esteem and independence.'**

Looking Ahead

Toyah would like to see the Government bring disability equality into the national curriculum for primary schools, so that children are aware of the issues surrounding disability and can carry this into their adult lives, affecting the way society approaches disability in the future. But for now, disability equality training is still necessary. Toyah would like to start training others to deliver disability training so she can see Equal Equality expand to other cities and reach even more young people with their valuable training.