



"We need to keep fighting on, moving forwards and stamp out discrimination"

Fiona Dawson

This is Me: Valuing the lives of people with learning disabilities is about challenging the stigma, discrimination and inequalities experienced by people with learning disabilities.

We have been working with self-advocates and family members of people with learning disabilities to share their experiences to increase public awareness of inequalities, and to challenge discrimination and influence positive change.

We interviewed advocate, activist and sports enthusiast Fiona Dawson who spoke to us about the work she does to support people with learning disabilities, including her Human Rights advocacy work, and what she feels needs to happen to make Scotland a more inclusive place.

About Fiona, in her own words:

My name is Fiona and I live in Ayr. I live independently and I'm loving it, I love the freedom and taking on responsibilities. What I love in myself, I love keeping fit, swimming and going to the gym. I love Art and design and being creative. I love listening to music and relaxing and doing yoga. I love helping others with disabilities and learning disabilities. It's really rewarding and it's my passion.

This is important to me. I'm involved in quite a lot of organisations. I'm involved with the Scottish Commission for people with learning disabilities (SCLD), the National Involvement Network (the NIN) and Equal Futures. I have a circle of support. This includes the Edinburgh Development Group and the Belonging Network where we talk about friendship within learning disabilities. I am also involved with the Champions Board, known as League of Champions, through South Ayrshire Health and Social Care Partnership and the People Led Policy Panel, where we talk about Adult Social Care and Human Rights.

I have three Jobs, including a role working as a Rapporteur through the Scottish Commission for people with learning disabilities (SCLD). As Rapporteurs, we are leading Include for Good, a program for change. We are going to be talking to the Scottish Government and making Scotland a better place for people with disabilities and learning disabilities. I'm an Arc Scotland Associate, this is a self-employed job. I also work at Seafield Stores, stacking shelves and helping customers. I love helping people with disabilities within our communities and making our communities to grow. We all need to learn to be part of our own community even more.

'This is Me' is about addressing stigma and discrimination experienced by people with learning disabilities. We would like to know your thoughts and feelings about this.

From what I know about discrimination, it is wrong, wrong to bully and there is too much bullying within disabilities and learning disabilities. I feel we need to stop this. Hate crime is a big issue for everyone. Discrimination can be challenging and hate crime can be difficult to explain. I know for me, probably once or twice it has happened. Luckily, I got through it. It's very hard to talk about and I believe people don't want to open up, because they are too scared to. Talking about it is the best option. Time to talk and time to move forwards and face reality. Don't deal with it on your own, there are always people about that care and are willing to support you. Go to the people that know you and get that right help and support. It can affect your mental health and health in general. We need to rule out discrimination and we need to open our eyes to what's around us. We need to believe in ourselves and do the right things. We all have responsibilities of our own. The world where we live can be cruel and people can take advantage of us. We need to keep fighting on, moving forwards and stamp out discrimination.

Please tell us more about the work you do to advocate for the human rights of people with learning disabilities

Through SCLD, I am a part of the Human Rights Town App Development Group, we have co-produced and co-designed an app called [Human Rights Town](#). This is for people with learning disabilities all across Scotland. You can download the app from Apple App Store and Google Play Store. It's for all devices. This app is trying to encourage people with disabilities to understand their rights. It's fun to use. It's really important for people with disabilities to have a voice and to be heard. Sadly Human Rights are not being met.

From my own experience, one time I went to respite care and thought I was going to get looked after, but I was not. I was put into a bad situation and none of the staff checked on me. They did not support me like they should have been. I felt let down by it all. Growing up, I was not taught about Human Rights, at least not till 2017, where I got involved with SCLD and I learned how to stand up for my rights.

I believe in the Human Rights Act, as it's there for a purpose and it's there to protect us. We all have Human Rights. Our Human Rights Act matters to everyone of us. I have done a blog on Why the Human Rights Act matters. It is on the [British Institute of Human Rights website](#), so please check it out. I care about human rights and I feel very strongly about this.

I'm a part of the Human Rights lived-experience group, which involves working with the Scottish Government on the Human Rights Bill in Scotland. I love the fact that I shared my experiences of everything that I care for and my passion. I will do everything that I can to make changes happen.

What needs to change to make Scotland a more inclusive place for people with learning disabilities?

There are so many changes that need to happen in Scotland. We need accessible places for people with learning disabilities and public transport. We need accessible information when needed, such as easy read. We need more public toilets, particularly in shops. Leisure Centres need to be accessible and online bookings can be difficult so I would like to see no more online bookings. This is why becoming a Rapporteur is really important; it means we can talk to the right people, such as the Scottish Government, so we can make changes happen to make Scotland a better place.

"We need people with learning disabilities to have a voice and to be heard, giving them a chance for them to be involved."

We need more groups and activities and things to do, this is all part of our mental health and what's good for us. I do really care about the mental health of people that have learning disabilities. It is up to the individual themselves to live their life. We need the right help and support and for us to have our own choices; we need to be in control. Changes need to happen to stop discrimination. Scotland needs us all to step up our game and doing something about it. I would like to encourage people with learning disabilities to get involved as much as possible. I would like to see what they can achieve, to have goals and dreams to follow.

Huge thanks to Fiona for sharing her thoughts on the impact of discrimination on people with learning disabilities, particularly on people's physical and mental health, and for her views on the changes we can all make to challenge stigma, negative attitudes and bullying experienced by people with learning disabilities.

Find out more about this project [here](#).

Share your thoughts, stories or experiences and join in our discussion using #ThisIsMe22 on social media

