

Lived Lives 6 – Steve



Interview Transcript

I use a wheelchair all the time but I'm quite independent. I got a bang on the head playing rugby and I broke my spine, and my vertebrae and my spinal cord, it just affects all four limbs. What's called tetraplegic. I was working at Cowley pit then. I was a miner at Cowley pit when I had my accident, and then I had to go back to work and I got a job in the control room there. So I worked in the control room for about six years, and then took redundancy, and then got a job with the council.

I worked for the council for just over 25 years, because I'm in a wheelchair you tend to come across all these issues around your job when you're working, but nobody looked at like, where the toilet was, which was in another part of the building near the day centre, so I used to have to go through three doors and get the day centre people to let you in because it was locked and then into the toilet if they weren't using it. They shut at four, if it's after four you couldn't use the toilet in fact. The people that put it up there didn't realize it, they didn't realize there were no car park. There was one car parking space beside the building, it's not an accessible entrance, daft as it seems, but now it all is.

The WANDS group, the same as all the other equality groups came about, I can't remember how many number of years ago when the council realized that they

weren't reaching all these excluded groups, like say we weren't having our voices heard. About 2000 and something, they decided that they needed these groups and the council set the groups up. It just went from there, we had a lot of disabled people coming to the meetings, we just got involved in having our voices heard really, when it comes to the policies and procedures, and our opinions listened to and then we found that people were actually coming to us for advice.

Gradually over the years it's gotten better and better, it's definitely gotten better and better, especially when it comes to reasonable adjustments. Managers are more on board with that now. I think more support in terms of better training. There's opportunity for the council to have it in-house, because people want to know, A, they want to know the law and B they want to know the policies that we have around it and how to implement them, and that's it really. That's what they need to know, I think we do need our experiences.

I'd run a disability training course, but it's really brief. I think you do need that quality training. The council said we were going to get it, but it's tick-boxes online, they're just tick-boxing. They should have at least a three hour course, quite regular, throughout the year, and that certainly managers should attend. And disabled people themselves often don't know their rights, don't or haven't got the strength to stand up to the manager. When you've acquired a disability you're not strong enough to come out and say to your manager, "I know about these, and I need this, this, and this". They don't want people to know kind of how bad it is sometimes for them.

It's quite life-changing for you. I think it is training, I think it's making people aware. Only when someone has a disability and they get pushed to one side, we get put in a particular place in a room, where we don't want to really be, but the manager will say, "well that's the best place for you, because then you're not in the way". People can get by you, and if you need to do this, we'll do that for you, you get this, and you can get in and out easier. When really, you want to be where you want to be in that room, you want to be able to go around the room, not be stuck in one place. Other people can move around.

Access to buildings is not too bad now, most of them. A lot of them you can access, most of the tables of the council in their training parts, I can't get underneath, my knees are hitting the side. So it's all these sort of physical features which are the most difficult. I've always taken part in consultations because if you don't they'll say, "well, we couldn't get nobody to consult, you should've told us all this". And I said, "well, we do tell you, but you just take no notice".

I don't see improvement when they've consulted. But when I see improvement is when they've had to do it because the law is telling them to do it. For years and years I've been saying, if you're serious about employing disabled people you will advertise where disabled people will read these adverts. But you never ever see an

advertisement from Wakefield Council for jobs in any disability magazine. And I've seen them from the fire service, from the police, loads of public sector. Never ever have I seen one from Wakefield Council.

They request expressions of interest from staff in social care areas, so like social workers, or if you're interested in being this manager you can express yourself in 250 words why you want that job, and why you're that person for that job. Those expressions of interest go straight through the service manager who looks at them and then decides who has that job. Sometimes they don't even bother with the interview process, and that bypasses all the selection and recruitment processes that we have in the council. All the equalities that we have in the council are bypassed. I don't actually know anybody who's above line-manager role, with let's say, a physical disability. And I think people have just given up sometimes, and just left and gone elsewhere, because it's so difficult to climb the ladder. You just don't get those jobs. We're just not recruiting people with physical disabilities who're gonna climb the ladder.

If I apply for a training course through workforce development, and I'm accepted, I get an acceptance email and on that email it says, if you require a reasonable adjustment making, you have to give at least two weeks' notice for us to make that adjustment, which is rubbish, because if I wanted coloured paper, which is a reasonable adjustment. If I wanted a PowerPoint in large print, is a reasonable adjustment. It takes two minutes, not two weeks. If one of my team members is going on a training course and then they suddenly say, "oh, I can't go", or they've gone home sick, the manager says, "Can you go?", and I say, "yeah, I can", but I need a PowerPoint in large print and I need coloured paper, and I need to give two weeks' notice. And it's only four days to go, I can't go because I can't give them that reasonable adjustment.

They're doing the equality report, do you know, this will be the fourth one, to my knowledge, and not one of them have been published. I've taken part in all the consultations, and not one has been published, and you'd have to say, why? But I suppose the good story is that I have seen progression, especially when it comes to some of the reasonable adjustments. People seem to get reasonable adjustments more easily.

Well, one thing that'd be better for us, in terms of people understanding around disability.