

ORAL HISTORY EXTRACT TRANSCRIPT

'Fighting for our Rights' project

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Extract 1: Education experience

Well it's not something I can remember that well, to be honest. It's just a period of time that I wasn't at home for term time. I felt very comfortable because I was with other disabled people, whereas once I'd left there and I was pushed into this new environment of mainstream school, I obviously--, I stood out. I was one of two disabled kids in the whole school, so you then began to feel vulnerable, picked on, but in the end, it made you confident. You didn't feel confident when you first went there, but it helped with your confidence as you grew older, how to handle these type of things. Most of the people that were at the residential school I was at had spina bifida, which is what I was born with. There are levels of spina bifida, you could be paralysed from the chest downwards. I'd say at least 50 percent were wheelchair users at that time, and yet there were others who, to my eyes at that age, I wondered why were they there? I couldn't work out why they were there, but clearly they had some neurological problems, otherwise they wouldn't have been there. The challenges came later on, when I was in secondary modern, trying to fit in with mainstream schooling. Well by that, I just mean obviously somebody with a physical disability stands out a mile at mainstream school. They were very unenlightened days. Now I think you'd be far more comfortable as a disabled student at school. You'll be more accepted. In those days, the often-used word would be 'crippled' or 'spastic'. It was a very common name for the other kids to throw at you. You would never hear that sort of language these days.

Extract 2: Starting at KCIL

Well because I knew very little about disability then. I didn't consider myself to be disabled at that time. I hadn't claimed any disability benefits that actually I later learned I was entitled to claim because I was of the mind set, I'm not disabled. I don't need your help. I'll come back when I do. Some years later, I did. Years later, I looked into and I thought, actually I probably will claim DLA, Disability Living Allowance. I got turned down initially but then on appeal, I was given a higher rate mobility. But being turned down initially is nothing, really. I later learned that at least 50 percent of people are initially turned down for DLA, and even to this day with PIP, you still get the same type of figures. PIP is Personal Independence Payment, which has taken over from DLA. So everything I've learned about disability, I've learned in the 17 years I'm here. So I joined what was then KADP in January 2000 as a part-time admin assistant to the then development director, who was working towards making KADP a centre for independent living, which we weren't. We didn't have that status at that time. He left the organisation probably 18 months after I started and then the staff who were originally here, slowly, they moved on from positions and as certain staff moved away, I picked up pieces of work to do because somebody had to pick up, like the finance part of the job or servicing the board of trustees part of the job, and that just automatically fell into my lap somehow and I accepted it. I suppose it was a challenge and I thought yeah, it helped me to develop, so why would I turn that chance down? Well the more of those pieces of work I picked up, the longer I found myself being in the office. Therefore my role evolved from being a 21 hours a week admin assistant, I was then made a full-time office administrator by the new CEO, who was Mark Moss, who was instrumental in this organisation, first as somebody who ran what we used to call the ILS, the Independent Living Scheme, which is now the Direct Payment Scheme. He had many impairments but despite that, he had a lot of energy, a lot of drive. He really drove this organisation forward and it was he who took us through

becoming a company, so incorporation. So a bit of history about the premises. We were based in Siddeley House, in Canbury Park Road in Kingston, with a lot of other voluntary organisations in 2000, at the time I joined. Around about 2004, we outgrew our office there, we had to look for new premises and the premises here at River Reach were the only ground floor premises we could find. However, this was not an office. It was an unused, basically an unused car sales showroom and that was its lease use, as far as the council were concerned, so we had to get a special licence from the council to convert this unit to an office and we were given a special lease for five years for this office. So I project managed the contractors coming in and fitting this office out because it was literally--, it was a shell. Everything in it now was fitted out by us.

Extract 3: KCIL services and challenges

Historically, Kingston Council used to give a pot of money to KCIL, Kingston Centre for Independent Living, to run a holiday grant scheme for disabled people, whereby they could apply for an amount of money to support them with the costs of going on holiday. RBK ceased that scheme in March 2016 and shortly afterwards, the board of trustees of KCIL made a decision that actually that was a service too important to let drop. So they made a decision to fund it ourselves from our reserves; and that began in June 2016. At that time, we also decided that there was a need for disability-related equipment. So they set aside a similar amount of money from our reserves, to run this grant for equipment, which has been pretty successful. We've helped half a dozen people in the last nine months to purchase equipment that they otherwise wouldn't have been able to get through the local authority. Just recently, we've discussed that there's probably a need for grants for people to attending? training, educational courses, training courses, so we've set up a small scheme for that as well, which is only just getting underway now, so I don't know, we can't judge yet the success or otherwise of that.

Well I think a lot of it's around language and positivity. It's that evolution from handicapped to disabled to then not talking about the medical model of disability, talking about independence. So you've evolved from that person is handicapped, to with the right support, that person's independent, so you become far more part of society. So there wasn't that much evolution from KADP to KCIL, other than us becoming an incorporated body. Our aims remained the same, they always were the same, to support independence, to campaign for independent lives. If anything, some of our members and service users might have thought that the change to KCIL made us too corporate and we were no longer what they saw as the friendly local organisation that they could drop into. There's an argument there, that perhaps we became too professional. Our biggest challenges are going to be financing the organisation to continue it. Finding funding for it to continue and we may have to look at joining forces with other disability organisations going across boroughs. I mean, we're constituted at the moment for services in and around the Borough of Kingston. In the future, that may have to change. We may have to go further afield and join forces with other disability organisations in perhaps Richmond, Wandsworth, Merton, or the areas that border us so that we bolster finances together so that we are strong enough and big enough to be able to apply for funding and for projects which will come up in the future. There's going to be strength in numbers, I think, because otherwise small organisations, I think, will just get swallowed up. There's always the danger that small local organisations will get swallowed up by one of the national organisations, who have got lots of resources and who would like to take on things like the direct payment service that we run.