

ORAL HISTORY EXTRACT TRANSCRIPT

'Fighting for our Rights' project

Surname

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Extract 1: the Malden Centre

I'd always considered returning to work, but when I started enquiring about childcare and the reality of getting childcare for a child with a disability, I began to hear sort of, yeah, brick walls, everywhere, and realised that there is huge obstacles, and huge inequality, so on the one hand the government in this sort of period of time were thinking a lot about childcare and there was a big campaign called Thinking Big: Childcare for All, which was launched I think by the Labour government, it was during that period. And it was called the National Childcare Strategy, and that they were rolling out, and the slogan was Thinking Big: Childcare for All, and I wanted to return to nursing, part time, and to help with the finances of the home, obviously, and I couldn't find childcare for Rachel. And then I was aware of this National Childcare Strategy that the government had launched, and within the documents it had targets, and it said quite clearly that its targets were aimed at single parent households, ethnic minorities, childcare for disabled children, and keyworkers. At that point I wasn't a single parent, but I was a keyworker and I had a disabled child, and I happened to be a mixed race woman so I fell into the sort of BME category as well. And so it was quite naively in a lot of ways because I'm the sort of person that when I read literature, not literature, but factual evidence and documents I just assume it's going to be carried through, so this opened a whole new world to me of policies and strategies that I was completely unaware of. And I thought, well if you had this book, you had this booklet in your hand and it says this, this and this, then the local authority would just give it to you, and that's what I did, I went to the local authority, and I said, "Well but in this document it says Thinking Big: Childcare for All and specifically it's talking about disabled children, and children from BME communities, which Rachel is both of those, and looking at key sector workers, so can I have some childcare please, I'm happy to pay for it, but I'm having difficulty getting childminders or people to come into the house to look after Rachel because of her needs, they're saying, oh no, we can't do that," I said, "I've gone and knocked on the doors of holiday clubs and afterschool clubs." And a particular one was at the Malden Centre, which is in Blagdon Road, and they've got lovely holiday clubs and afterschool clubs there, and I said, "Well can you take my daughter?" and they said, "No, not unless she has--," well first of all they said no outright, they actually said, "We don't take disabled children," you've got to remember this is the 1990s, so then I looked at their policy and it said, talked about equal opportunities and non-discriminatory practice, and had in their disability, you know, we do not discriminate against children with disabilities, ethnic minorities, blah blah blah. And so I went back to their manager and said, "But you've just told me that my daughter can't enrol in afterschool clubs and holiday clubs, because she's disabled, but this is what it says in your equal opportunities thing." So there was lots of discussions between the local authority, the Malden Centre and me.

Extract 2: Kingston Special Needs Project

Edward Davey became the first Lib Dem MP...was that in 1997? I think it was. Anyway, he had received a letter from me about childcare, and he'd also received letters about speech and language

therapy, and other issues to do with children with disabilities, from Sue Baker and Liz Mayes-Reid and Julie T Wallace, and we didn't really know one another, I had met Sue and Liz at that point, but I'd never met Julie, and basically he brought us together. Because he'd got in his mailbag some letters from different mothers about issues that they were having regarding special educational needs, speech and language therapy, whatever, statementing, a variety of issues, he actually introduced us to one another. He invited us all to a meeting to one of his surgeries and I remember they used to be on a Monday morning. We then--, he said, you know, "You've all got different experiences, you're all quite outspoken ladies," [laughs], "is there something you can think of doing together?" and he said, "I would be supportive of that," and that's how Kingston Special Needs Project was born. So we were looking to achieve a sort of variety of things. We were looking to achieve better speech and language therapy, quicker access to speech and language therapy which never seems to have been achieved, because there were children with significant speech and language issues, who are all nonverbal, completely, two years on the waiting list, under fives, so your maximum, you know, time to be working with children is when they're under five, we all know that, it's not rocket science, you don't need to be a professional to know that, that's the time where children are developing all their skills and if you lose that it's very difficult to catch up, basically, it's very very difficult. So speech and language therapy was a big concern. The whole statementing issue of how children get statemented, and what's covered in that statement because it's a legal document, you know, it's part of the Education Act, and what provision should be given by the local authority, and my campaign was around childcare and play. So those were my sort of two biggest concerns, and the others as I said had, you know, the variety of other issues. Although they--, it's not that they weren't issues for Rachel, but they were sort of covering those bases and I had a sort of different interest if you like. We held meetings, we went to the press, we had social events, often at Warren Park Children's Centre.

Extract 3: provision for learning disabled community in Kingston

That whole world has changed and, you know, a lot of people with physical disabilities do not want to be going to a day centre, so now we need to really scrutinise what's happening for people with learning disabilities, some of them can engage in community activities, and I know that they're doing that, some young people through Kingston College, through gardening schemes, through work experience, in shops, in childcare, in supermarkets, what have you. So the day centres have to really think carefully about people with severe and profound learning disabilities, because that's where the gap is. They're being left out, and there is not enough provision for them. And people don't know what to do with them, because you can't sit my daughter down and go, "Oh, paint a pretty picture," or, sit on the computer and do a computer game, or, "Let's go out and choose shopping and cook a meal," yes you can try and put those things in place, but the reality is they need far more specialist intensive sensory stimulating activities, from really skilled practitioners, so things like intensive interaction, and sensory stories. And I'm not seeing those practitioners here, they're not visible to me, and you know, I had to, as I say email, beg, put together a whole proposal for having a pilot scheme for three sensory stories. And we'll see what comes of it, but you know, did anybody else ask? The thing is, lots of parents are asking for things, but they often don't go with a proposal and that's what I've learnt to do as well, instead of saying, "Oh, we want more stuff for people with PMLD," and then you go, and say, "Oh what do you want?" "Well we want more stuff," and then writing it on a form, and then you go, nobody does anything, "Oh we'll just tick the box, 'cause we want more stuff for people with PMLD," it doesn't get you anywhere, nobody listens, nobody takes any notice, which is not fair really, it's not fair. It's far better though, it works better if you can go with a solid proposal, "This is what I'd like to see happen, can you put it in place." But there's not many people that do that, you know, and I can't do it on my own, it's hard, you know? It is hard.



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