

My name is Carole Wolstenholme, I have been reading about the government strategy and 'Improving Life for Disabled People.' I've been reading your website for two reasons:

(A) For study purposes for my degree in Special Needs, also my work as Special Needs Coordinator in a large division of public libraries working for East Lancashire Libraries and Information Services.

and...

(B) Because I am a mother of a child with severe learning difficulties, a carer and someone who is very active outside of work striving to improve access to quality of life for disabled people. Having said this, I believe I am practical and understanding of the difficulties involved in trying to achieve these aims; from the perspective of my role as a mother and also my experiences of 'disability's within the context of a 'non disabled environment'.

The other day I took my son Simon onto our local park, it was very busy and some young boys ran up to the ride that I was helping my son to climb onto. Some parents were sat close by on a park bench watching the activity. The young boys immediately began to laugh and call Simon names like, 'the funny man'; chanting what could be described by some people as 'hurtful and offensive' remarks. One parent who was obviously embarrassed, called to her son from a distance and tried to intervene.

I can't say, as a mother, I don't feel hurt when this kind of thing happens, but my priority is to look after Simon. One of the main and most effective ways of doing this is to take the opportunity and however negative it might appear, use it to help other children learn and understand that Simon is very much their equal. It is also crucial for me to be sensitive to why other children sometimes act in the way they do? possibly because they are educated with theory but do not get the chance to learn from applying that theory to real life experiences? By giving all children that chance, we are more likely to secure an inclusive future. I send Simon to a special school, that is my choice, but too often I wonder if we forget about inclusive practice outside of the school environment, regardless of what type of school our children attend?

We made a positive start on the park the other day, some of the children learned more about disability and actually made friends that day with Simon, waving to him as he left the park.

In 2003, I designed and delivered in public libraries across Lancashire, a service called SMILE, which promotes opportunities for inclusive reading development and also inclusive thinking within our communities; for this work I was awarded the National Public Servant for Social Inclusion by Public Finance and the Cabinet Office.

I would like to contribute to something as important as the government strategy, but my duties as a carer do restrict me quite a lot, hence things like now! working away on Good Friday morning whilst my son is sleeping.

I believe I have something to offer; the work I do and the studies I have available are very 'real' and 'down to earth' with excellent evidence of good practice which I always design with inclusion at heart, as well as the ability to 'replicate' which is very important, particularly in relation to public services.

If there is any way I could contribute to your strategy or any process of the governments 'vision' or if you would like me forward you a portfolio of my work and the evidence/outcomes of good practice, please could you consider this and let me know?

In the Library where I work I am currently working on a project for 'Carers', setting up a Library and Information Service. Carers need smooth passage to accessible information, Carers are crucial components in anything that affects the lives of disabled individuals who are supported by Carers. Healthy and informed Carers are much more likely to enjoy fulfilled lives themselves, this so often leads to a better quality of life for the person being supported. If nothing else comes out of this e-mail, could I least underpin that point, my life has been changed around because I work in a library and have access to information. Well, my son has come in with a book in his hand!, he can't read and never will but he loves books and we read stories together and talk a lot about what is going on in the pictures- I now have no time to round this e-mail off more professionally as I would have proffered. My apologies.

Yours sincerely,
Carole Wolstenholme