

PLACE FOR ALL

EQUALITY

DIVERSITY

INCLUSION

“ My journey across the public sector. ”

Dave Smith, Access Officer



EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

Sharing personal stories and perspectives to foster inclusivity in the workplace

One of the positive things I have found working for public services is there is a greater chance to have better opportunities to be yourself.

I am registered blind and have dyslexia. From age 9 I attended a boarding school for children who were blind/visually impaired where they could provide the right kind of learning environment to support my learning.

I was born with my disability. Growing up as a disabled person in the 70's and 80's was more challenging than today as we didn't have the protection of the Equality Act, or similar legislation.

In those days, there was little support once you left school. I started working by joining the Youth Training Scheme (YTS) and spent 15 months learning IT and general office skills. My first job was working for an engineering company. Under a government scheme, the employer was part-paid to employ disabled people. My work included operating a large grinding machine which wasn't very suitable for someone with my level of sight loss.

Employment law also lagged, and I often faced workplace discrimination relating to my disability. The view at the time seemed to be that a 'normal' job wasn't possible for someone with my kind of accessibility needs.

So, I decided I needed to educate myself. I thought 'I'm going to learn my employment rights so that I can understand how to challenge the discrimination.' The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) came into effect in 1995 on the back of protests. I joined a union, UNISON and became an activist. Their training gave me the skills I needed to help myself as well as other disabled people.

Attitudes have been changing over the years of course. One police force I worked for had only 23 out of 10,000 employees identified as having a disability. When I left, the number was 1,000, many of which were living with PTSD which was better understood by the end of the 2020's.

In 2004, I joined West Sussex County Council within the EDI department and learnt my trade. I was made redundant after six years when the EDI team was closed due to 'austerity'. The councils stated that 'we don't need a central EDI team anymore because each department needs to do EDI itself!'

In 2012, I worked for a number of police forces and started to understand and implement Reasonable Adjustment Management Processes (RAMP). These are reasonable adjustments for disabled employees, and I was proud to have a positive impact on over 300 staff. These processes have now been copied and adopted across multiple locations.

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In 2022, I was approached by York City Council who notified me of their new role of Access Officer where I now work. This was created as an outcome of a City Centre Access Plan to improve accessibility in the city, including the re-introduction of blue badge parking. I am enjoying my new life in York, working with dedicated people both internally and externally to improve the lived experiences of disabled people.

We need to increase the education and awareness of the general public in this area. I have developed personally due to working in public services where I have had better career progression, as they look at what you can bring to the role and not your disability.

However, we are quite not there yet. With my trade union hat on, there are others who still struggle to be identified for the skills they have and who have not had such positive outcomes.

Having said all that, a diverse and inclusive workplace, irrespective of your particular protected characteristic, is a more effective, productive and representative one. We still need to continue to do more to improve the diversity of our workforces so they embody the communities we represent.

I do wonder what I would be doing if I did not have a disability - the fact that I cannot drive has had a significant impact on the number of roles I could have applied for. However, I am where I am because of my disability, and this has motivated and helped me progress in life. Attending a boarding school for the visually impaired and then moving into public service has helped me grow and be more determined.

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