**An Inclusive Future**

I feel very privileged to have been able to attended the Disabled Workers conference on the weekend of 27th to 29th October 2019

We stayed in the Radisson Blue hotel at Manchester Airport; this is where the conference took place. The hotel was beautiful as was the food throughout the conference

60 Disabled member from across the country attended, their disabilities were varied and many

Our first task was to talk to our table about someone we knew who has a disability that we admire and we find inspirational. We then went on to do the same but about a famous person that we did not know. Many people were mentioned, David Beckham, Lady Gaga, Stephen Hawking’s, Abraham Lincoln, Robert martin, Queen Anne to name but a few

I found it very interesting and moving listening to different peoples stories and why they find these people inspirational

A member spoke about “UK Disability History Month”. He spoke about leadership and disability and encouraged us to talk to our school about supporting staff with disabilities. Historically disabled people were a form of ridicule, people would pay money to go and see them at the fare or in freak shows. 50 years ago it was decided that it is not the disability that makes the person disabled, it is the structures in society that mean they cannot do certain things so therefore makes them disabled. There are many laws that protect disabled people within establishments of work and this included school. Those with disabilities should not fall under the normal sickness procedure

I attended a Regional Network Group Session there were two of us there from Southern Derbyshire. Across the country, 450,000 NEU members are disabled. Many schools are not making reasonable adjustments to support the disabled staff; the staff feel very let down. Sometimes all that is needed to help is a quiet room that can be used for a brief rest through the day, a named person in school that they can go to when feeling stressed, someone who can attend meetings with them. When we are holding our district or branch meetings, we need to ensure that they are accessible for all.

I attended a workshop on invisible disabilities. We discussed what people have said to us that we have found offensive: You do not look disabled, But you did it yesterday, Who did you con to get your blue badge as you are not disabled. There are many disabilities that cannot be seen, not everyone who is disabled uses a walking aid that can be easily seen. In the 1970’s the social model of disability came along and this wiped out the medical model of disability. We looked at some case studies around making reasonable adjustments. We discussed what the union can do to support staff who are having difficulties; Identifying the barriers, getting reasonable adjustments put in place, talk to workers about their rights, represents members and challenge prejudice.

Before dinner we listened to some member talking about their positive stories and how they have supported and helped other members with their difficulties within schools

On Sunday we listened to the 17 people who wanted to go to Annual Conference in 2020 and the 12 people who wanted to go to the TUC Disabled workers conference. Each person had to say s sentence about why they wanted to attend and then we voted. We also voted on the motion that we all wanted to be taken to conference

Amanda martin NEU Presidents spoke to us about being our own voice and being heard and how the union can help us as it is tough working in a school without a disability and it is even harder to work in school with one.

Mary Bousted one of the general secretaries spoke to us, she has spoken to many of the members who have attended this weekend and they have all told her how much they have enjoyed the conference. Earlier in the year, she met Nick Gibb Schools Minister with a number of disabled members to talk about the difficulties they face in school, especially the difficulties disabled member face with invisible disabilities. Schools that have students with disabilities produce students that become more tolerant as adults; they understand and accept everyone in society. Schools are not inclusive as they are exhausting places for staff and children alike who are disabled. 90% of parents who appeal when turned down for school places for children with disabilities win their appeal. 8,000 disabled children in the country do not have a school place.

Samantha Renke spoke to us, she is an ex-teacher, an actress and a disability campaigner who suffers Brittle bone condition, She is a full time wheel chair user, she has had roughly 200 fractures stemming back from within the womb. She is best known for her role in the Malteasers advert. She has 2 passions in life, acting and performing and her charity work. There are 13.1 million people living in the UK that identify as having a disability/additional need, yet they are only represented by 3% on our TV screens. She gave up teaching, as she felt that the school did not support her.

I thoroughly enjoyed attending the conference

Julie Nall