

# **TOMORROW'S LEADERS A WORLD BEYOND DISABILITY**

# CONTENTS

## **03 FOREWORD**

## **04 INTRODUCTION**

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## **05 ARTS, SPORTS AND LEISURE**

- 06 Awa Jagne
  - 07 Azeem Amir
  - 08 Emily Mannino-Jeatt
  - 09 Harry Bucknall
  - 10 Jabe Peake
  - 11 Kieran O'Hara
  - 12 Matthew Humphreys
  - 13 Meg McFarlane
  - 14 Sam Holness
  - 15 Stuart Young
  - 16 Tom Hawkins
- 

## **17 CAMPAIGNING, ADVOCACY AND INCLUSION**

- 18 Aaron Evans
- 19 Andrew Smith
- 20 Azrab Mohammed
- 21 Courtenay Bird
- 22 Dan Watkins
- 23 Emma Bedeen
- 24 Jess Inaba
- 25 Jo Tolley & Emma Cross
- 26 Lincolnshire Young Voices
- 27 Jordan Smith
- 28 Kate Grant
- 29 Nadia Clarke
- 30 Nicola Jacques

- 31 Samuel Hills
  - 32 Siena Castellon
  - 33 Temitope Onanuga
  - 34 Dr Wesley Scott
- 

## **35 ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND EMPLOYMENT**

- 36 Aled Soos
- 37 Charlotte McMillan
- 38 Ellie Greenaway
- 39 Dr Emily Allsopp
- 40 James Aston
- 41 Jessica Starns
- 42 Joe Fautley
- 43 Luke Nadin
- 44 Poppy Cain
- 45 Rosalind Hardy
- 46 Theodor Sergiou

# FOREWORD

Across the country, young disabled people are leading the way in their chosen field of expertise. We know that they are ambitious and work immensely hard to achieve their goals, as well as having a positive impact on their community.

We don't hear about their successes often enough. Their achievements should be celebrated and their skills acknowledged. Having spent most of my own working life focused on improving outcomes for disabled children and young people, I am consistently inspired by young people's determination to create change, often in the face of great adversity.

I am delighted that the Council for Disabled Children and our Transition Information Network have been able to support the Education and Training Foundation (ETF) in developing this publication showcasing young disabled people's stories.

They are stories that are diverse. They represent the wide range of goals, knowledge and accomplishments of our young people. Some are excelling in the arts, others in academia, others still in sports. Many are involved in designing services and influencing policy to better reflect the needs of disabled people. All are linked by a dedication to helping others.

Their stories will inspire the professionals working in our schools, colleges, and care settings, but should also show how important employers can be in all of our lives. We should have the highest aspirations for our young people and I hope that these stories will be a valuable asset for all disabled children and young people. As Dan Watkins, one of the young people featured here, says, "everyone should feel wanted, valued and part of something special. There's a place for everyone in the community."

We still have a long way to go in creating a world that is accessible and inclusive for young disabled people, and we will maintain our commitment to that objective. I hope that this publication will help to challenge perceptions of disabled people and their achievements. They inspire me, and I hope they will inspire you, too.

We publish this, of course, at a time of unprecedented uncertainty with particular challenges for young disabled people. The coronavirus crisis has forced all of us to change the way we live and work, and it will be especially difficult for the community which we seek to support. We must always ensure their voices are heard.

It has been a privilege to support with this crucial publication. We would like to thank the ETF for their commitment to this piece of work. Particular thanks go to all of the young people who have told their stories, the people who nominated them, and all the professionals, parents and carers who continue to enable and empower them. We are hugely grateful to you for what you do, and hope this represents some recognition of quite how remarkable you all are.

I have no doubt that this is only a starting point in capturing the range of achievements of this group of young people, but it is an important first step in making sure their stories are heard. Let's look forward to hearing much more about them in the years to come. They truly are tomorrow's leaders.

Best wishes,  
Dame Christine Lenehan

Director, Council for Disabled Children

# INTRODUCTION

The **National Student Voice Parliament** meets several times a year bringing together learners with special educational needs and disabilities in the Further Education (FE) and Training sector. The learners hear from a range of experts on the latest thinking in FE and learn from each other. At a parliament meet in 2019, I got chatting to two young people on my table. The two were both doing their A Levels and looking forward to going to university in the Autumn to study politics and history and make their mark on the world. These two ambitious learners happened to be blind. They told me how often assumptions were made about them and how they wished people could see beyond their disability and recognise them as whole people.

Two months later a colleague forwarded me a link to the **Power 100 list** which outlines the 100 most influential disabled people in the UK. The list includes people from the arts, sports, politics, in fact every area of society who are leading the way and have something to say. The journalist, presenter and comedian, Alex Brooker, was voted number 1 in 2019. This got me thinking about the two students I met and the hundreds of young disabled people going through our education system and how they are the future Power 100.

Everyone at the Education and Training Foundation is delighted to have worked with the Council for Disabled Children on developing and publishing *Tomorrow's leaders: a world beyond disability*. The young people featured are all achieving great things in their own lives, in their communities and wider society. Our education system, and very often FE providers, recognised their potential and worked with them to ensure that they achieved their aspirations. The publication is an inspiration to us all, particularly those learning and working in education, and a good reminder that we are all so much more than just one part of our experience. We hope you enjoy reading about these wonderful young people.

Best wishes,  
Teresa Carroll

National Head of Inclusivity, Education and Training Foundation

Using their incredible passion and talents, this group of young people inspire others to dream big and work hard in order to achieve success. With determination and focus, these young people showcase the diverse abilities of young disabled people within many sports, arts and leisure opportunities on a worldwide scale.

They see the sky as the limit and aim high for their achievements. Ultimately, they diligently work to break down barriers and remove stigma to influence other young disabled people to go for their dreams.

**ARTS, SPORTS AND LEISURE**

# AWA JAGNE

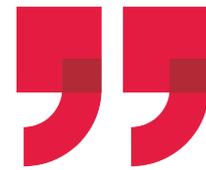
## AGE 21

Awa is a dynamic performer and is involved in drama and script writing at Act Up and Talawa Theatre companies. Additionally, Awa is taking part in a production of *The Marxist in Heaven* with Hackney Shed drama group. She works at the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith for Turtle Key Arts in an administrative role as well as impromptu work for the Graeae Theatre Company.



Her rise within the theatre industry was supported by making her debut with a Shakespeare performance as Hermia, in her college's production of *Midsummer Night's Murder*. She successfully applied to the Graeae Ensemble, a pioneering artist development programme for young deaf and disabled people. This placement was initially for a week but Awa was subsequently offered a part time internship for six months.

**My life goal is to write and direct my own play and also to perform in a television comedy as I believe that disabled people should follow their dreams and shine**



Awa facilitated a year-long story telling workshop at Croydon Music and Arts at the Oasis Academy. She has also taken part in a professional read through in the Dorfman suite at the National Theatre, followed by working at Rose Bruford theatre for Graeae.

Whilst gaining significant experience within theatre, Awa also studied for accredited courses and achieved both Bronze and Silver Arts Awards. She openly shares her experiences as a young person with Cerebral Palsy, who overcame the physical and emotional challenges she faced. She uses her experience to support others to understand nothing is impossible if you have the right support, a positive attitude and work hard.

Awa attended the Orpheus Centre, an independent specialist college, and in her last term she was chosen to feature in a documentary film about the college and subsequently acted in a short film by Meehow Productions: *I AM*. Awa has used her own experiences and her talent as an artist to act as an advocate for disability and an ambassador at her college.

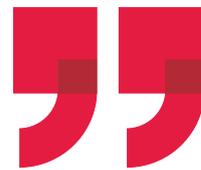
# AZEEM AMIR

AGE 21

Azeem is a footballer who plays within the English National Blind Football League. He has travelled worldwide to play blind football for the England and Great Britain team. He is an ambassador for several disability awareness organisations, highlighting the importance of inclusion. Additionally, Azeem is a terrific motivational speaker on disability awareness through his own organisation called **Learn with ESS (Education, Sport and Speaking)**.



**My goal is to change as many people's perceptions of disability as possible, to open everyone's mind to what disabled people can actually achieve**



Azeem's organisation delivers awareness programmes, which include: public speaking, educational activities on braille and sign language to enable open discussion about disability. Azeem has delivered the Learn with ESS programme to corporations, such as HSBC and Santander. The programme includes two disability sports: goalball and blind football, for participants to take part in through team building activities and interactive sessions.

Further to this, one of Azeem's goals is to incorporate wheelchair sports, like rugby and basketball into the programme. He believes that young people enjoy taking part in the programme as they have not done anything similar.

Azeem was initially scouted to play for the England and Great Britain team after he started playing football at age 15. He then made his debut in 2018 for the England team at the World Grand Prix in Japan.

Azeem attends university, he is in his final year of his undergraduate studies in Business and Sport Management. Staff recognised Azeem's strengths and talent, as well as the potential for his business to become a worldwide success, which gave him the confidence to launch his business.



**Encourage young disabled people to take every opportunity that comes their way and to ask for assistance in adapting opportunities to allow them to make the most of it - whether it's a sport like skiing or climbing or whether it's their education**

# EMILY MANNINO-JEATT

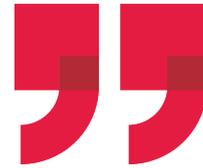
AGE 24



Emily is a performing artist at Chickenshed Theatre. She is currently completing a two-year Foundation Degree in Inclusive Performing Arts. Emily uses her talent to raise disability awareness and writes poetry about inclusion which she performs on her **YouTube channel**.

Whilst at Chickenshed Theatre, Emily has campaigned to raise disability awareness in the community. She's met with her local MP to discuss inclusion and recently presented a poem on inclusion at Middlesex University, she discussed her experiences of isolation whilst in secondary education and received a standing ovation. Emily also performed at the House of Commons to Members of Parliament when she was part of Interact - the inclusive arm of Stagecoach Theatre Trust.

**Stay true to yourself and don't listen to what people say because your opinion matters the most.**



In addition, Emily has developed skills in presenting, public speaking, and has increased levels of self-confidence. As well as campaigning to raise disability awareness, in the future Emily would like to become a published poet.

Emily attended Derwen College, a further education residential provision. She studied Art, Drama and Business over three years. Staff recognised Emily's potential and worked with her to reach her goals. She joined the college council and became the National Union of Students (NUS) President.

Furthermore, Emily joined a multi-talented performing arts group called Derwen on Tour (DOT). The group performed locally and nationally for different audiences and auditioned for Britain's Got Talent, where they highlighted disability awareness and showcased their abilities.



**Just be the best version of yourself and always follow your heart and your dreams, keep working hard until you get there.**

# HARRY BUCKNALL

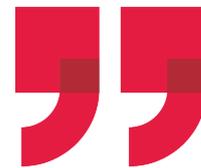
AGE 22



Harry is an Ambassador for the Newcastle United Football Club. He inspires other young disabled people to get into sports by using his talent for playing Wheelchair and Frame Football, as well as Boccia, which is a target ball game and Paralympic sport which tests muscle control and accuracy from a seated position.

He is a fantastic public speaker and he is actively involved the '**United as One**' campaign, in which he highlights disability awareness by visiting schools and colleges in the North East. Harry's influential role within the campaign helps to effect change in other football clubs to make them more accessible for disabled people.

**Just try anything possible, if you want to do it give it a go, there's all types of things out there**



Harry was specifically chosen to be an Ambassador for his football club after doing work experience at St James Park. He was responsible for looking into how the football ground could be more accessible, such as making recommendations about adjusting the height of the chairs at the bar, as well as checking the emergency cords in the disabled toilets, and that ramps were easily accessible to wheelchair users within the stadium. The football club staff members noticed Harry's dedication and passion and offered him the role of an Ambassador.

Harry attends Hedley College, which is part of the Percy Hedley Foundation, it is a specialist further education and training provider for young people. He is working to pursue his goal of becoming a Boccia and Wheelchair Coach. Experiencing new and exciting things is important to Harry and he's demonstrated this by taking on challenges, such as rock climbing and zip lining.

# JABE PEAKE

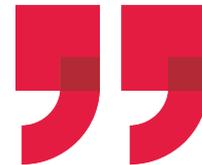
## AGE 20

Jabe is a Boccia gold medallist who plays for the England Team. Boccia is a target ball game and Paralympic sport which tests muscle control and accuracy from a seated position.

Jabe and his team have travelled to Poland, where Jabe achieved the individual gold medal and his team won the bronze medal. Furthermore, in 2017 and 2018, Jabe won in the National Championship within the BC1 division. A vast amount of persistence and practice was required to successfully work towards achieving the National Championship over 4 years.



**I want to show others that are disabled that this shouldn't be a barrier to achievement**



He successfully did his A-Levels at Sixth Form and is currently in higher education where he is actively working to overcome the barriers within the system. Jabe demonstrates his values of not allowing disability to be a barrier to achievement and finally feels accepted for who he is.

Jabe is a dual career athlete studying for his degree at Loughborough University. He is on the Talented Athlete Scholarship Scheme and he motivates and inspires others by going to schools to talk to children and young people and sharing his experiences of Boccia and Disability.

He successfully overcame the initial challenges of managing his 24 hour Care Team, through a bit of trial and error and he now describes his experience at university as being the best year of his life and is proud of being independent, having control of his life and making his own choices.



**I have developed resilience and am able to overcome challenges by accepting my disability and everything that comes along with it**

# KIERAN O'HARA

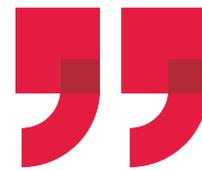
AGE 20

Kieran is part of the Paralympic Development Academy and is hoping to run at the Paris Paralympics in 2024. He is a middle distance runner, which includes the 400m, 800m and 1500m, and has recently won a bronze medal with his team from Havering Athletic club in the Essex Road Relays. He has run in Para competitions and in mainstream races too and enjoys getting to meet athletes from all over Essex.



Kieran regularly goes to different Saturday morning Parkruns and has run 76 so far and won 17. He has won lots of awards such as the Havering Disability Sports Competitor of the Year, the Havering Talented 30 Awards and a Jack Petchey award. Last year he ran in a race against Michael Brannigan, a Paralympic champion from the USA, who is autistic like Kieran. They had their photo taken together and he wore his gold medal.

**I would like to win a medal at the Paralympics but the most important thing is just to do my best**



Kieran sticks to the same routine, warming up and getting to the start in plenty of time which helps him to keep calm and focused. Kieran's parents go with him and his coach helps with his training and is always there to cheer him on.

As long as he's trying his best he's never disappointed in himself. He trains really hard, six days week all through the year despite the cold, wind or rain but he enjoys it, it makes him feel good and every year he is getting better.

Kieran is proud of his achievements and loves the feeling of standing on the podium and beating his personal best (PB) although he accepts that you can't get PBs all the time.

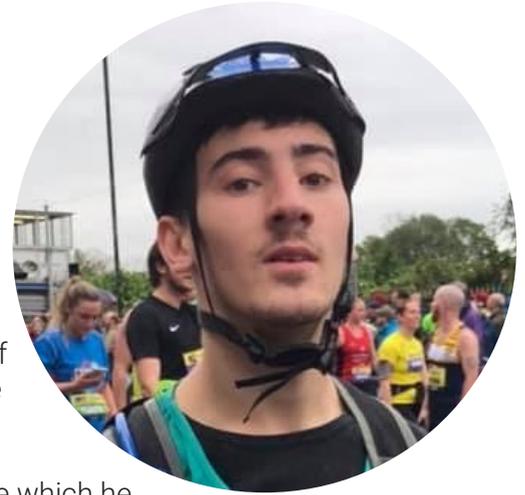


**Once the race has started I just have to run**

# MATTHEW HUMPHREYS

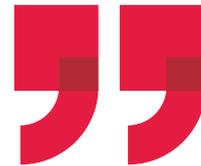
AGE 22

Matthew is a dedicated sportsman committed to using his talent to raise funds for charity. In 2014 he completed the BBC One shows Rickshaw Challenge. As part of a team of 5 they cycled a rickshaw from the plot of Coronation Street in Salford Manchester to the plot of Eastenders in Walford in London over 450 miles. As a team they were able to raise over 2.5 million pounds for the BBC's Children In Need.



In order to run and raise money for charity he needs a specialised bike which he purchased in 2018 by raising money to go to the Cerebral Palsy World Games in Sant Cugat, Spain. The bike is called a storm runner and cost £5000, which he raised.

**If you work hard at something then you can inspire others to do the same.**



Matthew was due to run the London Marathon 2020 and would have been the first person to race in the marathon using a racerunner - hopefully this is an ambition he will be able to complete in the future.

He has had various injuries from falling off his racerunner, most recently he managed to break two of his fingers but he found a way where to make sure he could return to training as soon as possible.

Matthew has also attended Portland College and continues to be a dedicated campaigner alongside his studies. Over the years he has not only raised a huge amount of money for charity, but has proven that anyone can do anything if they put their mind to it. Matt's campaigning for Scope has also inspired many other young disabled people.

A staff member from Portland College had this to say about Matthew:



**Matt's determination to succeed has grown over the years that he has been running with his racerunner**

# MEG MCFARLANE

AGE 17

Meg is a silver medallist figure skater after competing in Sweden as part of Team Great Britain in the January 2020 Special Olympics. Since she was a child, Meg's dream has been to showcase her talent by performing in front of a large crowd. She has enjoyed competing in figure skating and has been fiercely committed to her training. She is most proud of making the Great Britain Team on a consistent basis over the last 6 years. Her commitment and dedication has allowed her to consistently improve her results and techniques year after year.



**It feels amazing when everyone is watching you. It took a lot of hard work to plan and perfect my routine. Winning the Silver Medal made me feel like a real star**

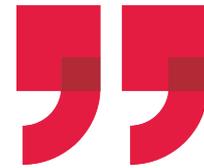


Figure skating is a very technical sport and Meg's achievements not only reflect her natural talent as a skater but also her hard work and dedication. Meg has demonstrated her ability to remember complex routines and deliver them with confidence to large audiences. Alongside this she also has to be in excellent physical shape and works hard with her college physio team to maintain her stamina and strength.

Meg's commitment to skating has also enabled her to develop a wide range of other skills which have ensured her continued success in all aspects of her life. Year on year her confidence has grown, including managing her heavy practice and competition schedule alongside attending college.

A staff member from Portland College had this to say about Meg:

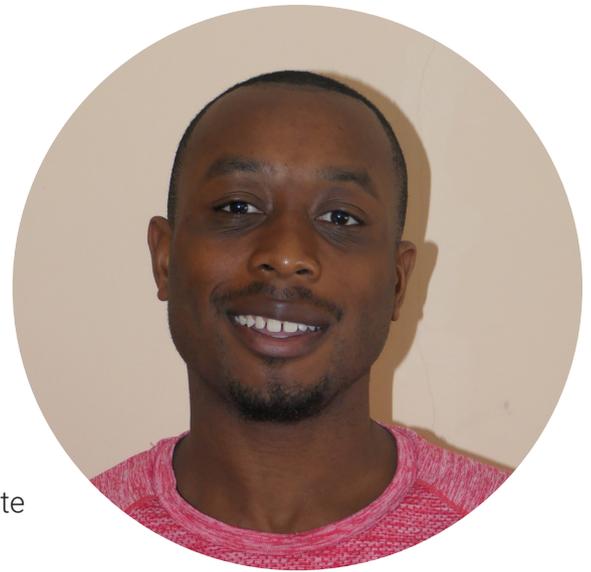


**Along with Meg's skating skills, her determination to succeed has grown over the years that Meg has been competing. She has learnt that if you work hard at something then your dreams can come true, a skill that can be transferred to all walks of life**

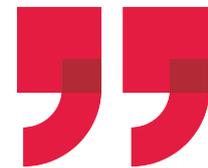
# SAM HOLNESS

AGE 27

Sam is a Triathlete, referred to by many as “Super-Sam”. As well as doing triathlons, he has many other achievements, including completing duathlons, half-marathons, 10 kilometre and 5 kilometre runs. He has taken part in the annual Superhero Tri event and his story was captured on the Chanel 4 show **Para Sport: Superhero Tri**. Sam’s unique journey into triathlon has also inspired others to participate in **British Triathlon**. His determination and focus has been used to motivate others in the **Time to be Awesome video** by the athletic shoe company Hoka One One.



**I want to encourage young disabled people to aspire to become elite athletes, by not placing limits on themselves, and by feeling confident to ask teachers and coaches to have high expectations of them and to create opportunities for them to compete**



Sam joined the Werewolves of London special ice hockey team in his mid-teens and became a brilliant ice skater. He did trampolining and won British Gymnastics awards as well as achieving a brown belt in Judo.

He attended two colleges to study a Level 2 BTEC course in IT and media studies and Level 3 BTEC in IT (Business). From there, Sam began attending team fitness sessions, which sparked his interest in the gym. This allowed Sam to start cycling and he joined a running club. The encouragement from his college to take part in activities alongside Sam’s actions to get involved in new things produced a significant change in his interest in sport.

In 2017, Sam graduated with 2.1 Bachelor of Science degree in Sports Science from St Mary’s University. In addition, he won the Patrick Lawless Award for personal development during his time at university.

He wants to make a difference by encouraging and motivating young disabled people, especially those with unseen disabilities, such as Autism, to participate in sport.

# STUART YOUNG

AGE 32

Stuart is committed to helping those less fortunate than himself and constantly challenges himself in order to raise money for a wide range of different charities.

His latest challenge and one that he is most proud of was a 70km trek to Everest Base Camp. For this event he swapped his guide dog, a yellow Labrador called Archie, with his friend Steve Parfitt, who is a team Leader working at his college. He completed the 17,500 feet climb to raise money for WESC Foundation, Blind Veterans UK and Nayamba School in Zambia.



**I do this to prove to others that a disability should not be a barrier to achievement**



In addition to this Stuart has also raised a considerable amount of money for a number of good causes by doing what he thinks most people would never attempt including:

- A 15,000 feet tandem skydive;
- abseiling down a building;
- underwater tunnel challenge; and
- a Marine/Commando endurance challenge where he ran a 17km cross-country course.

Stuart completed his education at WESC Foundation - The Specialist Centre for Visual Impairment in Exeter.

As a braille user he has a very keen interest in technology, which has now turned from a hobby to a career as he is a trainer of Access Technology at WESC Foundation.

This involves training other visually impaired young people and staff how to use computers with text-to-speech software, how to use mobile phones and tablets and any other new innovations that come onto the market to help those with sight-loss.

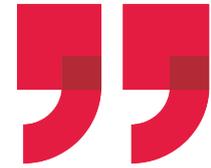
# TOM HAWKINS

AGE 23

Tom is a national Powerlifter and holds the British record for ABPU (Amateur British Powerlifting Union) Disability Squat and Bench. Not only is he a very accomplished sportsman, Tom openly shares his experiences of having Down Syndrome, in order to promote disability awareness and help others. His story was shared by the **'Positive About Down Syndrome'** community Facebook page, where his story reached over 130,000 views.



**My greatest achievement is being able to live independently in the community and have a job. I'm very proud that I can earn my own money and live in my own flat**



In addition to Tom's passion for sports, he also works diligently within the hospitality sector, where he is a valued employee. He advocated for the importance of disability employment by appearing on BBC's The One Show with Sally Phillips to highlight employment for disabled people. As well as this, Tom discussed the work experience opportunities he gained through his college, Foxes Academy.

Tom has an NVQ Level 1 Certificate in Hospitality Service, along with nationally recognised qualifications in employability, presentation and food hygiene.

Tom attended the residential college, Foxes Academy for three years and whilst at the college he had the opportunity of representing Foxes at Parliament, where he gave evidence to the Youth Select Committee on work experience. His evidence was then included in the resulting British Council – Youth Select Committee "Realising the potential of work experience" published paper!

Additionally, in Tom's second year at college he was awarded within the Outstanding Learner of the year category. As well as this, in Tom's final year he won the award for Inspirational Learner.

These young people use their voice and platforms to raise disability awareness not just for themselves but for those in their wider community. Their actions have been the catalyst for positive change in the lives of many young disabled people.

They play a significant role in shaping and influencing policies, practice and mind-sets to be inclusive of disabled people. As they strategically work to ensure that society recognises the needs of young disabled people, they also share their stories and experiences to empower others.

**CAMPAIGNING, ADVOCACY AND  
INCLUSION**

# AARON EVANS

## AGE 21

Aaron is a Young Consultant for the self-advocacy group, **Our Way**. Aaron has been involved in improving his local Special Educational Needs and Disability Information, Advice and Support Service (SENDIASS) website and posters.

He is often asked by schools for his advice to help improve their ways of working and create changes that promote inclusion.

He is a fantastic public speaker and has been delivering assemblies on disability awareness and anti-bullying to hundreds of students in local schools. As a young person delivering assemblies, speaking confidently and sharing their own experiences, Aaron has had a huge impact, inspiring the young people who hear him.



**The young people in the assembly really pay attention and listen to a young person. They admire the guts it takes to stand up on a stage and speak out loud**



Aaron's role allows him to influence and shape provision for disabled people in his local area by supporting the local authority. He enables the voices of young disabled people to be heard and valued.

Aaron attended Kidderminster Academy where teachers recognised his strengths and worked with him to achieve his aspirations.

Aaron openly shares his own personal experiences as a young person with Autism and a learning disability who overcame the challenges he faced at secondary school. His experience has helped him to be passionate about advocating for other young disabled people that are going through similar challenges.

In addition to his advocacy role, Aaron volunteered for the Mentor Link charity and now works in retail administration.



**My life goal is to help kids and adults with Autism and Learning Disabilities to have a better life and not have to go through the same struggles as I did and others**

# ANDREW SMITH

AGE 23

Andy is an Inclusion Ambassador/SEND Advocate for Bury Council working to make sure they not just listen to, but take action based on the views of children and young people with SEND. As a result of Andy's work, Bury Council has improved accessibility within the community for young disabled people, enabling them to attend local youth clubs and feel less socially isolated.

His passion for ensuring that young people's voices and views are heard has led to him creating the world's biggest consultation of autistic children with over 2,900 responses and this being shared as a manifesto of top 10 priorities for autistic children. In addition he then made a [rap video](#) of the responses to the survey which has had over 150,000 views.



I want to make sure the voices and views of young disabled people are heard by as many people as possible



Andy's experiences at school and later at university made him realise that he'd been trying to fit in and be like everyone else rather than accepting and valuing his differences. The real turning point was when he shared how he was feeling on [Twitter](#) resulting in responses from dozens of autistic people.

His perspective changed from 'I need to be like everyone else', to 'I have to live a different life to everyone else, but that doesn't mean it has to be an unhappy one'.

Since then Andy's life has transformed, now in his spare time he:

- Co-chairs the North West SEND Young People's Coproduction Steering Group
- Created and chairs the Greater Manchester Selective Mutism Network
- Participates in The Autistic Cooperative, a network of over 600 autistic advocates
- Is a neurodiversity ambassador at the ADHD Foundation
- Helps to run, set up and support SEND young people to attend inclusive local social groups.



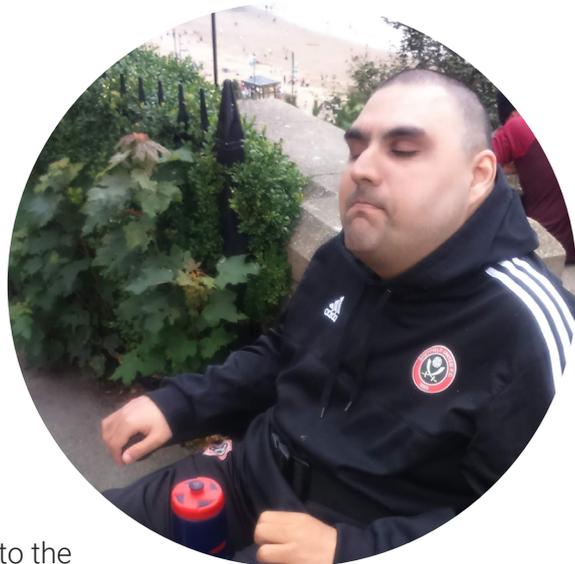
I have one goal in life that is more important than anything else: making sure as many SEND young people avoid the challenges mine and previous generations of disabled people have faced

# AZRAB MOHAMMED

AGE 33

Azrab is an advocate and campaigner, who promotes the independence of young disabled people encouraging them to go into the community and visit inclusive spaces. He actively works to provide feedback to help make community spaces more accessible for wheelchair users and people with visual impairments.

His campaign to 'make trams safer' in Sheffield has resulted in more accessibility for wheelchair users. He sent multiple emails to the Sheffield Tram Secretary highlighting his concerns in order to influence planning and bring about change within his community. In addition, he is currently promoting inclusion by developing a list of disability friendly places that he has visited in Huddersfield, Bradford and Doncaster.



So many places think they are accessible but they're really not



For Azrab, life is about having full control to make his own choices. His passion is to use his voice, and to represent the voice of others, to help remove the barriers present in society. This not only has a positive impact on his life but the lives of other young disabled people in his community.

Azrab advises restaurants, venues and public spaces in his community on reasonable adjustments to ensure accessibility.

He wants to share his experiences of having a visual impairment, learning disability, diabetes and anxiety to ensure others are able to enjoy accessing their communities.



Have a voice to speak up for disabilities

# COURTENAY BIRD

AGE 29

Courtenay is an advocate for young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). He has helped to shape local services and improve support for others as well as making spaces more accessible. He has recently helped re-design the **Causey Hall** activity centre. His work championing the voices of young disabled people resulted in a building that is now fully accessible; all on ground level, with wheelchair access and accessible toilets.

Since 2015, he has been part of the SEND Reference Group at Calderdale Council where he has played a leading role in making resources accessible and promoting young people's safety online.



My goal is just to get on with  
life and be happy



Courtenay's commitment to helping young people stay safe online prompted him, with his peers, to design practical resources for his community. This included creating a poster of 10 top tips to stay safe online which is now being used by schools across Calderdale. He can also be heard on an **podcast** made by the SEND Reference Group on how young people can keep themselves safe online.

Courtenay's efforts have also helped to boost other young disabled people's confidence and he aims to show everyone that it is OK to have a learning disability. The people he works with have said that he is a natural leader, a good organiser and responds well in a crisis.

Courtenay is a regular speaker at public events and to local groups promoting inclusive practice. He hopes that the work of advocates like him will enable everyone to develop the confidence he has gained.



If I could give one piece of advice to another young disabled person it would be to be yourself

# DAN WATKINS

## AGE 19

Dan is a Quality Consultant for **Dimensions**, who has been described as a 'future powerhouse' by colleagues. He has also represented Dimensions at the Learning Disability England Conference in February 2020.

Dimensions started to support Dan in September 2019, almost immediately it became apparent that he was ideally suited to work closely with others that struggle with mental health issues, social isolation, special and complex needs. His drive to help others is rooted in his own experiences. Staff members saw Dan's passion and recommended him to join the Dimensions Council. This gave him the chance to visit Discovery, a social enterprise, where he led a session for people on their rights, money and happiness.



Everyone should feel wanted, valued  
and part of something special. There's  
a place for everyone in the community



Dan was also part of an interview panel for a Regional Managing Director. As well as his work with the Dimensions Council, Dan is an Office and Engagement volunteer for Healthwatch Telford and Wrekin where he speaks passionately about local health and social care services.

He was part of the team that developed **Bee U**, an emotional health and wellbeing service for people up to the age of 25, living in Shropshire. Additionally, Dan shares his own experiences with other young people, as he is a part of the Young Peoples Forum.

Dan uses the difficulties that he faced whilst in education to make a difference. Through volunteering and developing his interest in social media, Dan was able to open up and share his experiences. He now uses his **DHWatkinsOfficial** Facebook and **Twitter** pages to highlight issues, provide information, advice and guidance, by asking the question "What are the difficulties you are facing?" and then researching how to help.

One of Dan's goal is to build awareness about the support required to promote positive learning experiences for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).



If anyone is struggling and has struggled the way I have in life, don't ever give up in what you believe in. Always keep on track of every movement you make in life because there's always going to be a time where things go wrong and you just need that little bit of support to boost your confidence back up

# EMMA BEEDEN

## AGE 19

Emma is an adviser to the NHS, the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) and Great Ormond Street Hospital on making health services better for young people. Her mission is to improve the lives of young disabled people and those with long-term health conditions.

To this end, she has taken on a range of roles that allow others to benefit from her experiences. She is a member of the NHS Youth Forum and spoke at the NHS Expo on the benefits of creating a diverse workforce by having staff with lived experiences of disabilities or health conditions. She is also part of a NICE committee developing guidelines on improving babies', children's and young people's experience of health care.



**It is important for people who work with children and young people to hear from them directly as no one knows the experience better than the person themselves**



In recognition of her work advocating for patients, Emma received a Diana Award last year. Emma is a confident public speaker and her skills are recognised by professionals in the health service. She has worked alongside the Chief Executive and Chief Nurse at Great Ormond Street Hospital to make sure the patient voice is heard at every level.

Emma's own experiences have reinforced her passion for ensuring the voice of young disabled people shapes support and services. She feels the best way to achieve this is to promote open conversations about disability, so she has spoken to children at primary school on the use of language and attitudes to growth conditions. She aims to improve people's understanding of disability, with the goal of creating a fairer, kinder society.

As a result of her work Emma is confident in travelling across the country with and without her wheelchair. A few years ago she would have been terrified by this prospect, but now she is happy to travel even when she isn't sure where she is going!

Her ambition is to become a youth worker and support other young disabled people and on top of all her other achievements she is studying Childhood and Youth Studies at the University of Sussex.



**This is something I was always told would not be possible... so it is amazing to prove them wrong!**

# JESS INABA

## AGE 21

Jess is a law graduate and a motivational speaker and enjoys supporting others, particularly those on the fringes of society. She highlights the significance of young disabled people adopting a positive mind-set to shape the future and realise the importance of being themselves.

In November 2019, Jess graduated in an accelerated two-year Bachelor of Laws degree. This unique opportunity enabled her to challenge herself and flourish academically. She is now completing a master of Laws along with the Bar Professional Training.



**My glass ceiling has triple glazing but still, I intend to break through it, taking as many people with me as possible!**



In addition to this, Jess has:

- Successfully been elected by her peers to become student president of her Sixth Form.
- Represented the entire student body by delivering the collective thoughts, experiences and desires of over 1000 diverse young people to senior officials.
- Delivered public speaking events at school assemblies, open evenings, to groups of carers and Health and Social Care professionals.
- In 2017, Jess received a **standing ovation at an award ceremony at Stationers Hall and Livery Lunch** with the members of the Worshipful Company of Stationers, one of the oldest and protected membership groups for the communications and content industry.

Being a Black woman with a disability, she has often been referred to as a “triple minority”. She made a conscious decision to conquer negative stereotypes and perceptions by turning using her experiences and turning them into positive energy and ambition.

Jess’ goal is to make life-changing impact in areas of law, such as; criminal, disability rights, family and immigration. Ultimately, she aspires to do a PhD in African and Asian history at the school of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), so that she can be a Law and History lecturer.



**My aim would be to help the pupils realise that the key for success lies in their hands, so we can take hold of our future and determine our own destiny! Together, we will be able to rewrite history by dispelling common misconceptions and changing the narrative of disabled people**

# JO TOLLEY & EMMA CROSS

AGE 26

AGE 23

Jo and Emma are the co-chairs of **Lincolnshire Young Voices** (LYV). They are passionate about the voice of young disabled people being central to service development and, with the rest of the group at LYV, have worked collaboratively with the local authority and the clinical commissioning group for health to develop a Service Delivery Plan which strives to improve access on public transport and within public toilets. As well as this, they are working on ensuring services support young disabled to live, learn and work and achieve their aspirations.



In November 2019 Jo gave a talk on equity vs equality and this helped her to realise that in order to make a difference for others she needed to change how she viewed herself. Ultimately this has led to Jo taking on her first employed role at LYV.

The group has provided an inclusive environment to enable young disabled people to be heard without any judgement regardless of their difficulties



Emma attended South Holland Post-16 college and they gave her the confidence to believe that her opinions were worth taking into account. They also empowered her to feel as though she could achieve her potential alongside others without any additional needs in a mainstream setting. Since then she has also completed a supported internship at a Nursing home in the activities team, an apprenticeship at MENCAP in the finance department and is now employed at LYV as the co-chair alongside Jo.



# LINCOLNSHIRE YOUNG VOICES

Lincolnshire Young Voices (LYV) is a pan-disability participation group of nine diverse individuals who together have a wealth of knowledge and unique experience, which they use to empower the disabled community.

The group have been involved in finding solutions that improve inclusion and participation within education, health and police settings, across organisations like Parent Carer Forums, Young Voices, Young Inspectors, Liaise and KIDS.



LYV have developed a Service Delivery Plan which strives to improve access on public transport and within public toilets. As well as this, they are working to enhance the transition to adulthood and expand the services that public settings offer.

LYV started in 2017, when it was recognised that there was a need for a participation group to work collaboratively across services to be the voice of young disabled people.

In March 2019, the group had a launch event to demonstrate their passion to empower the disabled community. The Lincolnshire Young Voices are supported by both Lincolnshire County Council and the NHS who recognised they needed to understand how they should change their organisations to ensure disabled people are able to access their services.

Their goal is to make a difference by focusing on the things that really matter to people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). They research the key issues that disabled people face and collaborate with various organisations, providing their expertise and sharing their experiences.

Connect with the Lincolnshire Young Voices here:

- [Facebook](#)
- [Lincolnshire Young Voices website](#)

# JORDAN SMITH

AGE 34

Jordan is the Health and Equalities Lead at **Dimensions** and he chairs the Dimensions Council. The Council is a group of people who represent all of the people supported by Dimensions, a large non-profit organisation that supports people with learning disabilities, autism, challenging behaviour and complex needs. Through his coaching and support, Dimension Council members have gone onto get jobs and travel independently. In addition, he Co-chairs Learning Disability England and sits on the NHS learning disability and autism advisory board.



**A lot of people have a dream to do something but they're not allowed to follow it through. It's okay to have the same dream every night it doesn't mean you're failing, it's okay to stop and think and take time out as long as you've still got the dream in your head**



As a former Cerebral Palsy Football player who played for the England team, Jordan has travelled far and wide to play the sport that he loves and also spends his weekends coaching disabled children and young people to play football.

He has been involved in training many Doctors (GPs) and NHS staff for the **#MyGPandMe** campaign. He raises awareness about the reasonable adjustments medical staff can make to provide a better service for people with learning disabilities.

As well as all of these achievements Jordan has also:

- Played football with David Beckham
- In 2021 he will be going to Jordan to set up female Cerebral Palsy football events.

# KATE GRANT

AGE 25

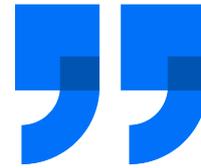
Kate is an active participant of the Calderdale Council's Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) participation group. She uses her voice to inspire change within the local authority and to champion the voice of other young disabled people.

Kate is determined to make a difference and has been involved in ambitious activities to raise money and awareness for charities.

At Linkage College she achieved a business administration and customer service qualification and she continues to use her skills in her work placements at Lloyds Banking Group. She looks forward to gaining further experience within the employment sector.



**I love going to work, I feel proud of what I achieve. I like being part of a team, and having banter with my colleagues**



Kate has cerebral palsy and moderate learning difficulties and she uses elbow crutches to aid her walking. However, this has not stopped her from pursuing her goals in life. One of Kate's proudest achievements is taking part in a Zumbathon for 3 hours, using her crutches. Subsequently, Kate raised £300 towards the Australian disaster relief fund and has completed a Duke of Edinburgh programme, gaining the Bronze Award.

One of Kate's aspirations was to move into supported living and recently, Kate moved into supported living with 3 of her friends. Her enthusiasm for life and her determination to succeed is what those who meet her think truly makes Kate special and this is demonstrated by the fact that in her final year at college she was elected as the college president by her peers and staff.



**Going to college was hard because I was really really homesick for the first year. But after that I enjoyed it, and I learned a lot in the house that I was living in**

# NADIA CLARKE

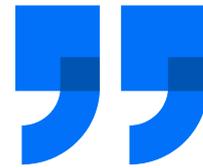
AGE 28

Nadia is a passionate campaigner who has lots of experience working with disabled young people. She is passionate about inclusion and works with disabled people to build their confidence and improve their communication skills and sharing her own experiences.

As well as her direct work with young people Nadia has also given many talks about her life and experiences as a disabled person, including speaking at the Houses of Parliament.



**I always work towards a world where everyone is included**



She loves to travel and has been all over the world and has recently started working with Inclu Travel as a Travel Ambassador. Part of this role is to help facilitate and encourage travel for disabled people. From her own experiences, Nadia knows that travelling with a disability can be difficult, as some places aren't up to date with accessibility requirements.

She attended a mainstream school after campaigning for equal schooling opportunities with her mum. She has cerebral palsy and is profoundly deaf, so has used an AAC device for most of her life.

As part of that campaign she wanted to show parents that they can be strong and can do what is best for their child.

Nadia would like to work with disabled people and their mental health in the future. She sees herself as good at listening to other people and believes a lot of people have interesting stories to share. She would also love to work within journalism and documentary filmmaking to continue to raise awareness for disabilities and equality.



**I have developed my listening skills and people skills which are crucial within my work - both listening to people and making sure I am listened to as an equal**

# NICOLA JACQUES

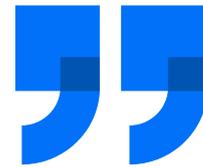
AGE 27

Nicola is a dedicated campaigner who is passionate about making a difference to other young people. She is a member of **Changemakers**, a group of young disabled people who are the strategic voice of young people for Manchester's SEND Board. She is also on the steering group for the Manchester Histories Festival which will be celebrating 50 years of disabled people's rights in June 2020.

Nicola has also worked with Manchester City Council's Work and Skills team to improve how they communicate the opportunities and support services the Council has available for young disabled people.



I'm proud of making an impact on the way the council recruit young disabled people



Nicola and another young person were nominated by Talent Match to spend time helping the Work and Skills team to improve their communication strategy. They put together a set of recommendations which are now being used to improve the way the Council recruits apprentices.

Her report on recruiting disabled people has influenced not just the Council, but many other partner organisations. One of the recommendations of the report was for the Council to run a disabled people's jobs fair, which resulted in at least five people being offered paid work and saw many others linked into employment support agencies and colleges.

Nicola obtained a position in the Council's Data Governance team, which led to her current position at Kiely Brothers, a company that repairs highways.

Nicola is combining her paid work with her many volunteer roles in Changemakers, the Histories Festival and continuing to help the Work and Skills team improve routes into work for disabled people.



I want to inspire other young people to make a difference

# SAMUEL HILLS

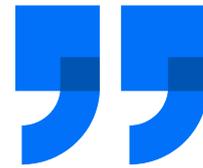
AGE 18

Samuel is a passionate activist and campaigns for young disabled people. He is a part of the Greater Manchester Youth Network, where he recently won the **Manchester Buzz Young Achiever award** that recognised his brilliant peer mentoring skills and the tremendous work he has contributed to the Change Markers Group.

Samuel also campaigned for safer transportation in order for young disabled people to confidently access their community after noticing issues around safety in transport in Manchester. He wrote to his Member of Parliament (MP) Lucy Powell, highlighting his concerns about safety for young disabled people. This resulted in her writing back to Samuel, complimenting and acknowledging his points of concern.



**I am proud of the work I have been doing with Greater Manchester Youth Network, where I constantly campaign for young people with disabilities**



Furthermore, Samuel was awarded the National Citizen Service award in recognition of the contribution that he has made to his community.

Samuel is also actively working on a project at the People's History Museum, looking into the issues that affect young disabled people.

As a young person with Tourette's syndrome and Autism, Samuel has worked hard and he shares his inspiring experiences in a book about emotional resilience that he co-wrote called *Second Chances*.

Samuel attends Xaverian College, where staff have recognised Samuel's passion. He took the initiative to teach himself Japanese and his college hosted the GCSE exam, which he successfully passed. Now, Samuel is going on to do an A Level in Japanese!



**Inclusion in education for people with disabilities is not only their right but it's important because without this I would not have been able to achieve all that I have, I want to eventually become a teacher and hopefully work with vulnerable young children**

# SIENA CASTELLON

AGE 17



Siena is a neurodiversity advocate who is passionate about changing stereotypes and misconceptions about autistic people and people with learning differences. Siena is autistic, dyslexic and dyspraxic. She also has ADHD. Disappointed at discovering that the online resources were focused on supporting parents of autistic children and children with learning differences, when Siena was 13 years old, she created [www.QLmentoring.com](http://www.QLmentoring.com), a website to mentor and support students with learning disabilities and autistic students. Siena also has over 6,000 followers on Twitter (@QLMentoring).

In 2018, Siena launched Neurodiversity Celebration Week (NC Week) to encourage schools to shift from only focusing on the challenges and difficulties of their students with special educational needs to also recognising their strengths and talents. Siena also created a website - [www.Neurodiversity-Celebration-Week.com](http://www.Neurodiversity-Celebration-Week.com) - which has free resources and information for teachers and schools that helps them to better understand and support their neurodiverse students. In March 2020, over 750 schools and over half a million students took part in NC Week across the UK, Australia and USA.

Never be ashamed of being different: it is this difference that makes you extraordinary and unique



Siena has also written a bestselling book. When Siena was growing up, she was unable to find any books written specifically for autistic girls. So, she decided to change this by writing the type of book she wished she could have benefited from during her tricky teenage years. The Spectrum Girl's Survival Guide: How to Grow Up Awesome and Autistic is an uplifting book full of practical advice and information that addresses the unique challenges that autistic teen girls face and empowers autistic girls to embrace who they are.

In April 2020, Siena ran a successful crowdfunding campaign that raised enough funds to be able to give a copy of her book to every girl's state secondary school in the United Kingdom.

Her greatest wish is that her neurodiversity advocacy will make others realise that being different is a strength and students will be empowered to embrace their uniqueness and be proud of who they are.

# TEMITOPE ONANUGA

AGE 23

Temitope is a skilled activist. She was an active participant of The Advocacy Academy, a young fellowship programme that equips young people with the skills they need to tackle social issues as an advocate. She took on the role of a researcher, working alongside the other advocates on the programme to construct a campaign in response to the housing crisis. She developed a presentation on previous housing campaigns done by other charities, to assist with the development of the campaign. As a result of the campaign Lambeth Community Land Trust's bid for a plot of land owned by Transport For London was successful, leading to a proposed build of 20 homes, a community space and green areas.



I have first-hand experience of various challenges as a young black disabled female that lives in South East London. I no longer want to see people within that demographic face similar challenges and feel that they are not heard within society



In 2019 she developed and delivered a workshop for young people with learning disabilities at the **Albany Theatre**. She developed and ran a session which enabled them to create posters and songs about issues that they would like to campaign about such as, lack of appropriate public transportation. As a result, she put forward the idea that letters could be written to the head of Transport for London, where the participants could share their own personal stories to raise awareness of the issues they have encountered.

In the past she attended a summer school where she was involved in a wide range of different activities, such as kayaking and horse-riding, which can often be difficult for young disabled people.

Additionally, she was part of young people's days run by a charity called **Hemihelp**, which supports families and children with Hemiplegia. These sessions included support in developing and identifying skills and strengths for employment and a **peer support group** on Facebook which Temitope has continued to be part of, including some members participating in her dissertation.

Temitope has continued to demonstrate her skills and build on her experiences as part of her Advertising and Marketing Communications degree, including working as a Senior Student Ambassador with her University. Furthermore, this year Temitope is taking part in the Leadership Development training programme called **Making Lemonade**.



Be willing to go for opportunities because lots of places are becoming more inclusive and they will value and hear you. They need your help

# DR WESLEY SCOTT

AGE 35

Wesley is an academic campaigning for the experiences of wheelchair users to be heard, valued and understood. Wesley's passion for campaigning is rooted in his knowledge of disability rights and his experiences in completing his PhD over 10 years. In 2018, Wesley completed his PhD in Industrial Design, his main driving force for this achievement was to inspire change and hope in others.

Wesley has shared his experiences with Transport for London (TfL) bus drivers for Disability Awareness training. His aim was to encourage them to take the right action to support disabled people to have fair access to public transport. By campaigning and working with TfL, Wesley has seen change in the way bus drivers are thinking and approaching situations when he uses public transport.



**We should all build positive working relationships and be a part of the community and if we all stop making assumptions the world would be a better place.**



During Wesley's time at university, he delivered lectures to undergraduate Design, and Health and Social Care students. He was able to share his experiences as a young disabled person and positively impact future workers to better understand the perspective of individuals with additional needs.

Wesley continues to advocate and inspire change by:

- Volunteering within the NHS Leadership Academy, influencing the learning and development of professionals
- Working with Carers of Barking and Dagenham to share his achievements and raise aspirations for others
- Fundraising for Carers of Barking and Dagenham by undertaking unique sponsored events. Such as, completing a 24 hour bus ride and in 2021 Wesley will be riding on the District Line from the first train to the last
- Working towards becoming an ordained Church of England Priest, to change perceptions and the narrative of disabled people



**Know what you are entitled to and know what your rights are**

These enterprising young people skilfully lead the way in their areas of expertise. Their drive and ambition positively re-enforces that young disabled people can reach the top of their field and achieve their goals. By taking steps towards overcoming barriers, these determined young people have not only changed the course of their own lives but also the lives of other young disabled people.

They use their professions and achievements to create a vital impact that supports the workforce and society to recognise what young disabled people can achieve.

## **ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND EMPLOYMENT**

# ALED SOOS

## AGE 22

Aled is an Ambulance Technician helping to save lives for an Ambulance Service in the Birmingham area. He is an active part of his community and has successfully completed his first year of training to be a Paramedic.

As a trainee paramedic, Aled manages the hectic schedule that is required of a medical professional. He puts himself in new situations, places and meets new people daily whilst having to make important medical decisions. Aled is constantly pushing himself out of his comfort zone to give back to the community through his career.



**I had the support required and have been able to overcome this barrier**



He works extremely hard to achieve his goal of a becoming a qualified Paramedic. Aled experienced bullying in school which impacted on his wellbeing, causing him to be out of education for two years. However, he moved from the mainstream school and attended North Hill House, an independent specialist school and from there he went to Farleigh Further Education College.

The support provided from key members of staff from both provisions allowed him to overcome many barriers, such as his shyness, making friends and communicating his emotions in an appropriate way.

The support from staff at North Hill House and Farleigh College challenged him to be in various social situations and this allowed Aled to pursue his desired career as a paramedic and he is now a effective communicator who is able to speak confidently with patients and his colleagues.

A staff member from Farleigh Further Education College had this to say about Aled:



**That Aled pushed out of his comfort zone every day to work towards achieving this is incredibly inspiring and something all young people with similar challenges should hear and see**

# CHARLOTTE MCMILLAN

AGE 24

Charlotte is a Civil Servant at the Home Office and has shown remarkable progression in her career having been top three shortlisted (out of 400,000) for a civil service award in the rising star category. Within two years she went from an apprentice to a permanent staff member and then entered a line management role through promotion.

Together with her career in the civil service Charlotte volunteers and is an ambassador for the Royal Society for Blind Children. In addition, she advocates and is becoming more involved with the Leber hereditary optic neuropathy (LHON) society for her eye condition.



**I work to encourage other young people to overcome their boundaries, and push them out of their comfort zone**



When Charlotte was 18 years old she began studying to become a nurse, her lifelong dream. It was all going to plan until a few months in when she could no longer see out of one eye in the following months she lost the sight in her other eye and was registered blind. Charlotte was determined to get herself back out there and since then, with the help of two charities, Charlotte has achieved huge success and built up so much confidence, leading to full time employment, winning awards and more.

Her achievements and impact do not stop there, she has also gone on to:

- Be a Young Ambassador for The Princes Trust
- Deliver speeches to large audiences in places such as St James Palace and Shakespeare's Globe
- Be an active youth forum member at the Royal Society for Blind Children; attending events at places like the House of Commons.
- Win a regional Princes Trust award in the Rising Star category
- Raise over £3000 for the Royal Society for Blind Children by running in the London marathon



**I have learnt how to adapt to change effectively and learnt to solve problems better. I have gained a huge amount of self-belief and resilience and use this every day to do new things and push myself and others further**

# ELLIE GREENAWAY

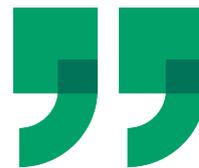
## AGE 24

Ellie works full-time for Happy Smiles, as an Inclusion Champion. She has delivered training to over 1,400 children, young people and adults in just a year. She encourages others with her own desire to live life to the full. She uses her own experiences and knowledge to empower other young disabled people, but also to inspire non-disabled people. She is motivated to show an alternative, more positive view of disability in order to reduce people's fear and misunderstandings.

To that end, she has delivered powerful sessions to large, diverse groups of people. She is an effective public speaker, regularly speaking to large audiences, including speaking to over 200 secondary school pupils to change their perceptions of what a young disabled person can achieve.



**Don't let anything stop you from doing what you want to do**



Ellie's training has received high praise: attendees have said that she gives a new meaning to disability, is a role model, and that her sessions are extremely beneficial, in no small part because she is professional but also personal.

Ellie's work goes further than that, she has been involved in demonstrating disability sports to young people, including sitting volleyball, wheelchair sports and goalball. Showing these activities to non-disabled young people helped to change their perspective on disability.

Ellie supports other Inclusion Champions and has demonstrated her leadership qualities by enabling others. Her passion is being with people and using her experiences to help others reconsider their preconceptions about the impact of a disability.

Her goal is to show people what disabled people can do, not what they can't do. Over time, she hopes this will tackle prejudices about disabled people.



**Don't be afraid of people with disabilities - they just want to be equal and not the odd one out**

# DR EMILY ALLSOPP

AGE 30

Emily is a qualified Educational Psychologist. She now works with children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and their schools to ensure they have the best outcomes possible, whilst also trying to challenge ablest attitudes as she goes! She aims to be senior in this role, and work her way up within special education and develop the local authority offer for disabled children and young people. She would like to highlight the important interactions between disability, gender and class.



**I'd love to advocate more for disability rights, I'd like to campaign for more inclusion within mainstream schools**



When Emily started studying for her dream career in Educational and Child Psychology 3 years ago, she realised how learning about disability and special education resonated with her in a way that far surpassed a degree and a job. Learning about what it meant to be socially disabled and about the models of disability, made her realise the injustices she had faced throughout her life and education.

Emily grew up in Doncaster, which she describes as your standard working class town in Yorkshire. She took a liking to Psychology during her A Levels and following this, gained a place at the University of Lincoln, to study the subject at degree level. After graduating, she worked in schools and gained a Masters in Developmental Psychology.

Emily has now worked in Doncaster for over 6 years and loves giving back to the town she is from, working to continue to improve the (already much improved) systems that she feels, at times, have failed her.



**I'd like to pass on to younger people, the empowering possibilities of working in disability whilst disabled and owning your identity to empower you to succeed. We offer a unique perspective on inclusion and our voices are needed to shape the future of education and care**

# JAMES ASTON

AGE 27

James is a campaigner who has transformed accessibility levels in sports grounds, Addenbrookes Hospital and the residential service where he lives. He is determined to improve the way society responds to disabled young people.

James confronts barriers to disabled people pursuing their own interests. He is a big cricket fan and noticed that there was a lack of changing places at major events. He decided to change that and contacted Graham Gooch – a former English first-class cricketer. As a result, mobile facilities were provided and he and another young person were able to attend a match. Further, Graham Gooch has pledged to provide changing facilities at all major county cricket grounds.



**I believe in challenging people not to make assumptions**



James has also had a massive impact on the lives of young disabled people that live in the same service as him, as well as those in the wider community.

He presented on transport accessibility issues to a Speak Out Council meeting for disabled people. He provided feedback about accessibility issues at a local hospital through the Voiceability group. James is motivated to make a difference and wants to raise awareness of the issues faced by young people with complex needs being part of the wider community.

James communicates non-verbally using a symbol book with partner assisted scanning. He understands spoken language and is driven to help others understand that people can communicate in ways other than speech.

James has also campaigned for an accessible poly-tunnel greenhouse and animals at his residential service. His goals are to make life more interesting and meaningful for himself and the other young people where he lives and one way he has achieved this is by setting up a temporary tattoo parlour on site to help raise money for the accessibility adjustments.



**I want to share my ideas about making things better and more inclusive for all of us**

# JESSICA STARNS

## AGE 29

Jessica is the founder of the charity Dyspraxic Me. The charity organises a series of workshops to help young people with dyspraxia develop skills for adulthood. In recognition of the impact of Dyspraxic Me, Jessica was the 64th winner of the Points of Light, awarded by the Prime Minister to outstanding volunteers who make change in their community.

She has developed programmes with a range of organisations, from national charities, to universities, to arts groups, but always with the focus on improving the experiences of young people with dyspraxia.



Through Dyspraxic Me, I have the ability to deliver programmes with multiple and varied stakeholders.



Since its founding, Dyspraxic Me has hosted 70 workshops, based on suggestions from young people themselves about the skills they would like to develop.

Jessica takes on a huge mix of responsibilities, from managing the budget to marketing and coordinating volunteers. Alongside directing the charity, Jessica works as a Volunteer Coordinator at the British Museum, where she makes sure young people who may need extra support have what they need to be able to volunteer there.

Jessica's accomplishments do not stop there, she has also just finished a master's degree in Inclusive Arts Practice, where she collaborated with disabled artists and made neurodiversity a central part of her research.

She is unwavering in her commitment to empowering young people with dyspraxia so that they can develop the skills they need but also meet each other and be inspired.

She is proud that she has been able to use her own experiences for the benefit of other young people and maintains her goal of continuing to develop Dyspraxic Me so that it can support even more young people in creative ways.

# JOE FAUTLEY

AGE 24

Joe has a national role in Information, Advice and Support Services (IASS) advising services on ways to support disabled children and young people. He also plans and co-delivers training sessions across England for IASS. His training is well-received and professionals have said that they have not just learnt from the sessions, but have also enjoyed them. He shares his own experiences of living with autism and dyspraxia to improve professional practice. During Children's Mental Health Week he produced a **Podcast** in collaboration with the National Children's Bureau (NCB), where he talked about his experiences.



I am passionate about continuing to be involved in work, which enables children and young people to directly influence decision making across a variety of themes



In addition, Joe has been part of the SEND participation team in the Royal Borough of Kingston Upon Thames, where he advised on the recruitment of candidates applying to roles within children's services. Staff members at the local participation team recognised his strengths and worked with Joe to develop his skills in order for him to achieve his aspirations of gaining new opportunities at a national level. As well as this, Joe is a fantastic public speaker, who has spoken at conferences and co-delivered workshops.

Joe holds a Bachelor and Master's degree in History. He openly shares his own personal experiences as a young person with autism and dyspraxia who has overcome the challenge of having anxiety.

As a result, Joe has been able to deliver training all around the country including Bristol, Manchester and York.



I have overcome barriers and increased my self-esteem

# LUKE NADIN

## AGE 30

Luke is an expert in assistive technology and the impact it can have for disabled people. He works in the research and development department of a company called **Microlink**. He has also harnessed the power of social media to demonstrate the passion and ability of young disabled people.

In 2015, Luke graduated from Portsmouth University with a degree in Business and IT. With the help of a charity called Superpeople, Luke made a **video CV** which went viral on social media and **LinkedIn**. The video focused on Luke's personality and passion for work; it showed that disability was part of Luke's identity and not something that defined him. He was offered an apprenticeship in technical support at Microlink which ultimately led to his current role.



**Don't give up if you're looking for work. Think outside of the box, the video CV is a new way to go about things and more companies should and will look towards this new idea, it allows companies to see a disabled persons potential**



Luke's greatest achievement whilst working at Microlink is publishing a report on the ways assistive technology can improve the daily lives of disabled people. The recommendations of the report may be implemented in care homes and other similar settings in the future.

Luke has been able to expand into areas of the company where he can provide insight and expertise on his experiences of living with a disability. By taking the time to understand Luke and his needs Microlink have put adjustments in place so that Luke is able to perform to the best of his best ability.

Luke is a skilled writer and communicator. His ambition for the future is to work his way up to the top at Microlink, he would love to manage his own team.

Luke hopes to continue to influence others about the positive impact hiring disabled people can have in the workplace. To that end, he is a Disability Rights UK advocate and has presented to Kingston University on his experiences.



**People have preconceived ideas about disabled people and I think video CVs bust that myth**

# POPPY CAIN

## AGE 20

Poppy is a passionate advocate for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). She is working hard to raise the profile of employing staff with both physical and hidden disabilities. As a result of her work in collaboration with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and Wirral's Chamber of Commerce there are increased job opportunities and more aspirational career options available for young people with SEND. Additionally, the value of supported internships is being appreciated and supported across the Liverpool City Region.



Within the Council, she has met with the Heads of services, the Directorate and the Chief Executive and challenged the process of recruitment with regard to disabled people.

**My role is to ensure the strand of youth voice, especially the voice of SEND young people, is heard and considered in all the Council does. I proudly represent the thousands of SEND young people in Wirral**



One example of Poppy's own experience and value as an employee is that her autism lets her see things in a very logical and practical way. She knows the importance of clear unambiguous communications and has supported a group of Ofsted Inspectors seeking advice on how best to interview pupils with additional needs.

Poppy has also worked with young people with SEND to design and deliver two key reviews, one looking at the Youth Offer in Wirral, which includes the diverse range of youth work, sports, arts, opportunities and activities available to children and young people. The other at Short Breaks provision for disabled children, including: youth and play activities, specialist play schemes, sporting activities and creative workshops. She has also been involved in work to ensure that Mental Health Young Inspectors programmes are being rolled out across Wirral schools to offer better and much needed support.

Through her role working in services to support young disabled people she is able to represent the voices of the 10,000 young people with SEND in Wirral to ensure their needs are considered and provided for.

She has presented to Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCOs) and strategic managers to give them a clear message as to the aspirations of the young people in their borough and has also added a dedicated **Young People's section** to the council's website.

Poppy attended Creative Youth Development at Pilgrim Streets Art Centre in Birkenhead where, after 11 years of selective mutism, she developed her skills in expressing herself through dance, drama, arts and photography, which improved her communication, confidence and self-esteem. She went on to College and attained a Level 3 in Childcare.



**Professionals seem to listen more attentively to the voice of a young person with SEND stood in front of them, so we used my 'disability' to educate people who need to know what we do.**

# ROSALIND HARDY

AGE 32

Rosalind is a remarkable public speaker who shares her experiences of growing up with asperger's syndrome to help raise awareness. She had a national role advising services on ways to support disabled children and young people and has planned and co-delivered training sessions across England for Information, Advice and Support Services (IASS).

The training is designed to make professionals aware of the effective ways that they can support disabled children and young people. For example, Rosalind has spoken on topics about how professionals can engage with young people with special needs, as well as on Autism and Post-16 support.



**I planned and delivered this to teach and develop their ability to work with Autistic children and young people, in order to improve outcomes for people with Autism**



She has worked with her local participation team, co-delivered training for NHS England and worked alongside an autism activist.

The prospect of helping people with autism motivated Rosalind to overcome the challenges that can come with public speaking. Staff members at IASS recognised Rosalind's strengths and worked with her to achieve her goal and she has successfully travelled to numerous locations within England to deliver training.

Rosalind believes that her different experiences in education have helped to shape the person that she is today. She attended a secondary school for young people with moderate learning difficulties and then went on to attend a Post-16 mainstream college where she completed equine studies and then animal care.



**IASS throughout England are now better equipped to help children and young people with Autism which means those with Autism will hopefully experience equal opportunities and outcomes that suit them**

# THEODOR SERGIU

AGE 18

Theodor is an entrepreneur, elected representative, and campaigner who has achieved significant change. At 14, he helped raise over £12,500 and travelled to a village in Ecuador to support a community devastated by earthquake. He represents London in the UK Youth Parliament and was the first deputy chair of the London Youth Assembly. In this role, he has led campaigns to end knife crime, including through proposals submitted to the Prime Minister.

He is committed to ensuring young people's voices are heard. He co-founded the Barts Health NHS Trust Youth Empowerment Squad, is a member of the NHS Youth Forum, sits on the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) committee on integrated care for those with severe complex needs, and is a Patient Advisor at Health Education England.



**My experience has driven me to review the world's situation so I can contribute to decision-making and activism**



His achievements go further than that. In 2016 he was one of the winners of the National Enterprise Challenge, and he was featured in the International EMMY BBC documentary, 'Same But Different'. He was accepted to the National Youth Theatre and volunteered at Chickenshed Theatre, supporting those with additional and complex needs.

Through all his activities, Theodor's focus has been on amplifying the perspectives of young people so that they are central to policy and practice. He has sought to bring together diverse groups of young people so that services more accurately reflect their needs.

Despite his visual impairment and long-term health needs, Theodor has consistently pushed the boundaries set by others to achieve a place to study Philosophy, Politics and Economics at the University of Oxford.



**I intend to grasp and fully exploit every opportunity**



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