



Introducing Health Sciences: Visual Impairment

Inequalities of Opportunity

Man

I think it's been a disappointment to me as a trustee of a number of, over the years of a number of organisations, including our main Royal National Institute of Blind People. It is that we are still facing a lot of inequalities for blind and partially sighted people, and in the UK, certainly from a UK perspective I think they would fall into about four categories.

The first would be the detection, intervention and treatment of people with eye diseases, which often can be uncomplicated if they're treated at the right time.

The second thing is the whole issue around the equal access to education for children, young people and adults, so that their education and training can be appropriate to this age which will then also give them greater opportunities for employment, and through employment comes economic independence.

The third thing is the need for local authorities to be properly funded to provide the kinds of support that bring people to a greater degree of independence – that can be mobility, it can be learning daily living skills, all sorts of things – and it's a Cinderella area of provision in this country, and that seems to me to be a bit scandalous in the 21st century. Why is it that, you know, we depend on charity, cups of tea and sympathy, where actually is what we want is a mobility officer or somebody to teach us how to use our computer. I couldn't guarantee now that if I needed that mobility instructor who got me back to work within three months after my blindness, I couldn't guarantee that I could get one now.

And the fourth is some agreement nationally to improve access to reading. The Right to Read campaign is a very important one because through knowledge, through reading, through education blind people can greatly improve their, it empowers people to have the knowledge that they need to improve their lives. And they are the kind of things which others take for granted and I don't think people realise that we have very limited access, despite the improvements through electronic media; we're still not automatically the case that I can go to my local library or bookshop and get an accessible book off the shelf.

And finally I suppose something around getting the message across that although blindness is, in some sense, it's a very difficult impairment for the individual to deal with, what makes that less disabling is the right training and services and support.