

Don't Put Us Away
Memories of a man with learning disabilities.
Richard Keagan-Bull
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Reviewed by Colin Bright

This is a smashing book that provides direct and intimate connectivity with the voice of a man that has experienced the difficulties of life through a period of immense social and political change within the UK. Richard provides a frank and open description of his experiences with a clear and consistently personal take upon his journey.

This is a wonderful opportunity for anyone learning about the historical development of social care provision for people with learning disabilities in the UK – presented in an accessible and heartfelt manner. As such, the book should prove both engaging and valuable for a range of readers: Health and Social Care professionals; Carers working and living with people with learning disabilities; academics and practice teachers seeking to explore engagement with the voice of people with lived experience; and students from the fields of Learning Disabilities Nursing, Social Work, Advocacy and Social Policy. I would also like to highlight the aspirational potential of this book for people with learning disabilities who might read about this journey and relate to Richard's experiences.

The reader is treated to a journey that captures Richard's life experience: starting from his birth in 1971. The book is separated into meaningful parts that support the reader to familiarise themselves with the author's voice. This is delivered with openness and contributes to a complete sense of authenticity and honesty – in short: you know that this is Richard's experience.

Part one of the book takes the reader through Richard's "Growing Up" and presents a historical journey through life with his family at the start of his life, through his school years and through his time at college. For Richard, this was an impactful and challenging time as he explores the positives and the negatives of growing up with a system that had limited understanding and limited resources to support development. Despite the challenges, Richard presents a positive and balanced perspective – interwoven with his undoubted sense of humour. Richard recognises

that there were aspects of his life that were far from perfect – but clearly values that he was able to learn about life through these experiences.

Part two takes the reader through Richard's immensely powerful experience of "Finding a Voice." Richard takes the reader through his engagement with opportunities to develop and explore his independence. As he passed through a change in the century – so Richard saw the development of opportunities for independent living, for travel and for personal expression. His courage to pursue every opportunity, and his genuine hunger for experience is infectious. This presents a personal perspective upon the significant theoretical developments and policy changes that impacted upon the lives of people with learning disabilities throughout this period.

Part Three presents Richard's transition to being a champion for the voice of people with learning disabilities and the significant personal realisation of what he could achieve. There is an underlying sense of purpose and hope that develops here – recognising the positive contribution and the potential to influence change.

Parts Four and Five then capture the positive sense of "Belonging" and Richard's personal recognition and acceptance of his achievements; signified by having "My name on the Door." There are reminders that life can present challenges, throughout, and Richard's openness provides a window onto the structural challenges present within the lives of people with learning disabilities. Yet, there remains a keen sense that this personal journey reflects wider societal shifts sparking the reader to explore and engage.

As stated, this book provides a personal perspective upon a life of experience. This provides a lens through which to consider key theoretical constructs such as "Normalisation," "Social Role Valorisation," and the "intrinsic value" of every individual. It will offer an opportunity for readers to both conject and connect with Richard's voice and, as such, is an invaluable opportunity for readers to pose reflective questions and to evaluate the opportunities and the lived experience of people with learning disabilities that they know.

In a world of Social Pedagogy and Strength's-Based practice; it is often difficult to imagine the historical journey that has underpinned current experience. This book provides an accessible narrative that can assist the reflective analysis of students contextually exploring their professional development. In this respect, this book can support Practice Teachers to encourage their students to synthesise their placement experiences

and theoretical knowledge, and to promote their engagement with the voice of people with lived experience.

The book does not provide explicit links to such concepts. I recognise that, if a learner requires more explicit scaffolding for their learning – this book would not match their need. However, as a spark for supervisory discussion and aspirational engagement - I would certainly recommend this title.

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