

2019 Understanding Disability Awards event - a great success!

Cardiff & the Vale Parents' Federation recently held our latest Understanding Disability Awards ceremony at the Future Inn in Cardiff Bay. Now in its 26th year, the awards celebrate examples where ordinary people have made an extraordinary effort to involve and include people with a learning disability in everyday life.

Awards are made in a variety of categories. Nominations received from the public are voted on by a panel of parents, professionals and volunteers. The awards are highly valued by recipients and highlight the efforts of hidden heroes within our community – people who generously give their time and efforts to help others.

Over 120 people attended the event to see people receive recognition for their efforts.

Awards were presented by the Rt Hon Lord Mayor of Cardiff, Cllr. Daniel De'ath and the Vale of Glamorgan Deputy Mayor, Cllr. Jayne Morgan.



Nick Davies



The day commenced with Nick Davies, a trustee of the Parents Federation and chair of the Understanding Disability Group, explaining why we hold these awards and thanking all present (and those that could not come) for their ongoing efforts to make life better for people with a learning disability.



Before awards were handed out, Nick French and Ashley Bale of the Innovate Trust, gave a presentation on how IT and technology is starting to help people with disabilities to live more independently. By the clever use of devices and apps that are available in the High Street, along with tailored support packages, people are now able to take control of many aspects of their lives. This approach is proving popular with many individuals who are enjoying being more independent and less reliant upon support workers to do everything for them.

The Innovate trust have a 'smart house' in Cardiff where people can enjoy respite breaks. it includes a plethora of high and low-key technology that can be tailored to meet the needs of people of widely different abilities so that they can maximise their independence. More exciting resources are in the pipeline and the Innovate Trust are currently working with partners to develop more apps and tools that people can use that will avoid their having to wait for others to support them.

Awards were made in 5 categories.

Children's category

Children are often better ambassadors of inclusion than adults. Often this goes unnoticed and not celebrated - the Children's Award aims to recognise a young person that has made a real effort to make life easier and more enjoyable for his or her peers.



A nomination submitted by a teacher who worked with a group of year 6 children who were helpers at Llanishen Fach primary school during last years' term was chosen for this award. These children volunteered to spend time with others who have additional learning needs at the school's Specialist Resource base, Dosbarth Enfys.

During breaks and lunchtimes, all the children would play games together and fully-engage in learning and play activities. They learnt songs and signs in Makaton (sign language) so that they were able to engage with children who were less able.

This was an incredible initiative taken by the children: it was very much child-led – with children helping other children

Local Group category

Local groups cover a variety of activities and when a group has mixed abilities, we like to see that the attitude Local groups are varied and we are looking for those which welcome and integrate people with learning disability.

Within a group of mixed ability we like to see that the attitude of the members without disabilities is welcoming and supportive, recognising that all people are different, that all have abilities and can achieve, with the help from any necessary support.

If the group comprises only those with learning difficulties, we like to see that their activities' benefit all members and promotes a positive attitude in the general public.

Two nominations stood out in this category, so the Panel made a joint award.



Pheonix Dance and Fitness Academy in Newport was set up by Gemma Levan two years ago. Gemma owns the academy and runs Contemporary, street dancing and tots dancing classes by herself.

Sessions are held at different venues to allow students who cannot afford the cost of travelling to attend. All of Gemma's groups are fully inclusive and her charges are a much lower compared to other dance schools. The Panel were very impressed with Gemma's dedication, especially to children and young people with learning difficulties.

The other award went to **Hijinx Theatre**, a renowned theatre group that promote inclusion at their training academy, Theatre and Community theatre Odyssey.



Members of Hijinx Theatre

Actors with a learning disability, Down's Syndrome and Asperger's Syndrome are cast with professional actors and seen as equals in theatre production and featured in the programme and promotional material.

The company gives fantastic opportunities to young people with an interest in drama and an ambition to become actors. Their productions have travelled the world and shown countless mainstream audiences how very capable our young people are.

A number of other nominations were received from the local group award. These were for three groups of brownies and girl guides, all of which the Panel felt should be highly commended.



Certificates were awarded to the 72ND CARDIFF GUIDES, the 2ND CAERPHILLY GUIDES AND the 2ND CAERPHILLY BROWNIES.

A further 'shortlisted' certificate was also made to the Cardiff Central Youth Club

Professional category



Debbie Walsh of Vision 21

The award in this category was made to **Debbie Walsh** of a local charity, Vision 21. Debbie developed, and now runs, Vision 21's Office Skills project for students with learning disabilities. The project trains 12 students a week in running an office, including reception duties. The course teaches life skills which enables the students to develop as people.

Debbie has given students confidence to run the telephone exchange system and to be the first point of contact when visiting the V21 head office in Fieldway, Cardiff.

Debbie has also organised work experience for the students at Companies House.

The Panel were impressed that Debbie has:-

- instilled an increased level of self-confidence in the students.
- provided good basic training for the students; and
- been very creative, taking on other roles in V21 such as organising teams for the learning disability sports day and organising student discos for Valentine's day.

The panel also awarded a highly commended certificate to Keith Marchant from the Innovate Trust in recognition of his dedication and commitment in supporting a young man with a learning disability to play an active role in his local community.

Another professional nominee that merited a certificate was Grace Kelly, a dentist who treats patients with learning difficulties at the Cardiff and Vale Dental Hospital.

Schools category

All children, particularly those with a learning disability, benefit from a good education given with sensitivity which will equip them with the knowledge and skills to achieve more independence. When a school demonstrates its willingness and ability to work along these lines and succeeds it is worthy of an award

There were a number of very good nominations in this category so the judges had a difficult task but their choice was Mrs **Adrina Jones**, formerly a teacher & SENCO at St Illtyd's Primary School in Llantwit Major.



Adrina Jones

Adrina retired this summer after many years' responsibility for children with additional needs. She ensured those children were included in all aspects of the school's life. Adrina also set up a sensory room at the school.



The team at St Illtyd's

Following a recent Estyn visit, Adrina's work was acknowledged in their Inspection Report. Adrina monitored her pupils' progress very carefully monitoring and she ensured that pupils with additional needs had detailed Individual Educational Plans which were updated regularly.

The Judging Panel also felt Adrina had gone over and beyond what is expected in order to get maximum support for her pupils from external agencies and professionals.

Also, in this category the judges decided to 'Highly Commend' three other dedicated staff who had high-quality nominations. They were:



Julia Davies, a Learning Support Assistant at Romilly School in Barry for supporting a young pupil on a 1:1 basis. Julia has been supporting him since he was in nursery. She has included him in every activity and supports him on trips and other days out from school. Julia has very good daily communication with Mum.



Amanda Williams, a 1-2-1 teaching assistant for a young girl at All Saints School. Amanda makes sure the child is fully integrated in school life, including breakfast club and after school clubs. As all kinds of visual learning approaches are used in the classroom, the pupil Amanda supports is not regarded as having a disability by her peers.



Laura Downing, a Special Educational Needs Coordinator at Gladstone Primary. She has supported a young girl who has dyslexia, dyspraxia and sensory processing disorder. The child had felt stupid, lost and desperate at first, but Laura helped her to overcome her fears. Laura has introduced various tools to help the child, such as sensory breaks and use of slime!

Employer category

This category recognises employers who are prepared to employ people with learning disability who, with suitable training and support. Thankfully there are employers who are prepared to employ people with learning disability but we are looking for those who go the extra mile by ensuring as far as possible that the working conditions take the employee's disability into account and provide any extra support which may be needed, particularly in the early learning stage.

The calibre of nominations this year was so high that the judging panel made joint top awards to two recipients.

JoJo Maman Bebe is a family owned chain selling maternity and infant fashion in 90 stores across the country. For several years now, their Newport branch has employed Sammy Jo and Tom, 2 young adults with Downs Syndrome.



Both Sammy Jo and Tom are fully included socially in the workplace and are paid above the minimum/living wage. The company is a flexible employer so staff hours can be changed where necessary.

Simon James accepted the joint award on behalf of **Workfit**, an initiative of the Downs Syndrome Association that is funded by the Big Lottery. The programme, which has run for over 5 years now, supports people with Downs Syndrome into volunteering, work experience and into full paid employment.



The workfit project

Simon James is the Project Manager for Workfit in Wales. He travels across Wales and is always looking for prospective employers who could provide paid employment, work experience or volunteering for people with Down's Syndrome.

26 years of service special award



A final presentation was made by the Parents' Federation and Understanding Disability Group to a long serving staff member, Hasina Kaderbhai. Hasina has arranged these awards for 26 years and been the driving force behind them, supporting the group members behind the scenes and ensuring that the event runs smoothly.

The award was presented by former colleague and Executive Director of Samaritans in Wales, Sarah Stone. Sarah worked alongside Hasina in the early years of the Federation and she shared some anecdotes of their time in those early days.

The day ended with thanks to our funders, especially to Consensus for their support in funding the event venue and awards and the ongoing support from Cardiff and the Vale councils.

We hope that you have enjoyed reading this.

Do you know somebody who deserves recognition for their efforts?

We are seeking nominations for the 27th Understanding Disability Awards in 2020.

You can nominate an unsung hero now – simply contact Hasina@parentsfed.org for a nomination pack. **Don't Delay !!**

Understanding Disability Awards event sponsored by

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