

## Fight for the Right

**What do people know about disability rights? The Tower Times reporters investigate how discrimination affects the lives of disabled young people, to bring about awareness on how our rights are overlooked.**

With very little coverage in the media, the voice of young disabled people can often go unnoticed. Speak to any disabled young person, and they'll have a lot to say about a variety of issues concerning their rights.

This can be anything from discrimination to accessibility, such as using public transport and getting around, attitudes of other people and what most take for granted - getting an education or finding a job.

Judith Appiah has learning disabilities, but has ambitions just like anybody else: learning to drive a car, owning a house, having kids and getting a good job. But even though Judith has applied for many jobs, she rarely gets a fair chance of getting them.

"I look in the paper and apply for jobs," she says. "Sometimes you get a letter to say that you are not acceptable for the job - that they don't accept people with a learning disability. I wanted to work in a library and they said that they don't take disabled people on. That's neglecting my rights."

But shouldn't people from all backgrounds be given credit on their talents and capabilities to do the job, rather than any disability they may have?

Most employers follow "Equal Opportunities", which should give all people a chance of employment, regardless of their race, sexuality, religious beliefs or disability. In Judith's experience, this is not the case.

And this is just one example of how society often looks down on disability, disregarding a majority of disabled people because of age-old stigmas and ignorance.

In most cases of bullying and hate crimes, disabled youngsters suffer in silence. Shaheena Begum has Down's Syndrome. She says she was bullied at her college, showing the attitudes people have adopted. "Someone at college came up to me and said, "Shaheena is a handicapped." That's not right to say that - that's being rude. It made me feel very upset, angry and depressed." To recall the memory still hurts Shaheena today.

Shockingly, these attitudes even filter through to the people who are entrusted with some of the most vulnerable disabled young people. There have been stories of carers who shout at their clients and not taking care of them when using public transport.

Emem Eniunam reckons that being a carer means being a friend. "You have to be a good person, who likes to go out with me. I don't like people who talk to me to upset me or shout at me. I don't take it - I tell them they can go shout at someone else."

So what can be done to enforce the rights of disabled people? Even though there has been recent media coverage on disabilities: Panorama's report on disability hate crimes and the highlighted case of the unfortunate deaths of Fiona and Francesca Pilkington, who suffered from ongoing abuse from local youths - it's down to everyone to change their attitudes on how disability is perceived, and to recognise disabled people are just like everyone else in society.

"Everyone is equal and everyone has rights," says Judith before offering these words of advice: "Let disabled people in. Give us opportunities and don't say "you can't do this". Don't discriminate against our feelings. Give us a chance in life."

### About this article

This article was compiled by Emem Eniunam, 21, Kathleen Hutchinson, 22, Katy Woollard, 23, Michael Tapps, 24, Shaheena Begum, 25 and Judith Appiah, 26.

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