

Beyond 2015: Shaping the future of equality, human rights and social justice (12 and 13 February 2015)

Session 1: Progress on equality, human rights and social justice: NGO perspectives

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Inclusion Scotland is a national Scottish disabled people's organisation led by disabled people, and our mission is to get the voices of disabled people into policy making. We are all about working with our membership to remove barriers to full inclusion and for gaining full citizenship.

So, what I was going to start off by saying is I find, as ever, the terms in which debates are put to be important to clarify before you go forward. We are talking about inequalities. What are we talking about inequalities of, or between what and whom? I would say, it is about income and wealth, it is definitely about voice and power, it could be about social capital, it could be about demographically defined groups and about territories, neighbourhoods or local regions, nations etc. Are we talking about any or all of those? I don't know. But I think we need to be aware of the different angles. Obviously, equality and human rights are interlinked but for me I think the important thing about human rights is that they signal how we view each other. About the fundamental equality that we have as human beings and a lot of what I want to say is about how I feel that very basic principle has been under attack and some of the implications of that. Social justice is a nebulous concept, as well as fairness, whether it is distributive, whether it is about cultural recognition, the valuing and recognition of difference – and I would argue, also sameness because that is what often gets overlooked. We spot the differences, we don't spot the sameness and it is the latter that are very important.

What is the most significant area of progress since 2010? Well, were I doing a Powerpoint presentation at this point I think what I would be doing is showing you a blank slide! That, however, is not the constructive tone that we wish to use today! So instead of that, I will quote something Alan Miller said earlier today about engagement in the democratic process on a very big scale, 85%, Alan said showed up to

vote. We have talked in smaller scale examples, the devolution of power meant that people can do very different things up there around key areas of policy for disabled people. Down here, the Independent Living Fund has gone and is going. Meanwhile back at the ranch in Scotland, they are not only continuing it by setting up the Scottish Independent Living Fund with additional money, it is co-produced with disabled people and their organisations and in the recruitment exercise in the next few weeks, the chief executive of the team will have representatives of disabled people's organisations on the panel in a very different kind of approach.

We are seeing, as I think we have done here, something around the joining up of health and social care. Again, it is very much participative. I am involved as are others from the third sector, on a variety of Scottish government working groups around implementation and around drafting statutory guidance. I was able to draft something on principles the other day, which is now statutory guidance. This kind of collaborative working and co-production is not perfect but it is definitely going in the right direction. Then we have a commitment around self-directed support, although this is where we start to get into slightly less rosy territory, in that the rhetoric is fantastic, all about promoting independent living choice and control for disabled people. In reality it has been experienced as cuts to care packages and nothing to do with care and control whatsoever. Finally on a positive note, something which is to be announced today by the Big Lottery, there is to be £5 million worth of research funding into independent living. Inclusion Scotland is the Scottish partner to that but there are partners across the four nations. So there is real potential there again for changing the way research is done and co-producing and action research.

That is the interesting and positive stuff, but what has been the biggest challenge? Well, in a word, I think it is around disconnection. We are all familiar with the idea that inequality is one of the things that disconnection does. It disconnects us from each other. Our lives become so very different, they stop overlapping in the middle so we start to lose empathy, the whole kind of sense of us all being here together is really not there anymore, because we have no real understanding of what each other's lives are like and therefore it becomes very difficult to

empathise with the real barriers people are experiencing. Alongside that, obviously we have austerity and I think the combination of the two is where you start to lead into what I would call 'dehumanisation', because what it does is it starts to make people think very judgementally about who gets resources, why do they get resources, why have they got them and why haven't they got them. A government that wishes to pursue certain agendas, may extend rather than reduce inequality because as far as some people are concerned, is what drives an economy and drives capitalism. What it does also do though is increase demonization. We have seen that referred to earlier on today in the media. It is about sanctions and hate crime and all these things that are going on and that you don't need me to tell you about. Of course what that does is to distract attention from what is going on up there with the people who really do have the power, and focuses it down here on people who don't have the power. That is where the battle takes place.

I would also like to suggest that there are one or two other sorts of disconnections going on which may be significant. There are disconnections in discourses. Sometimes the disconnections are because people are talking about quite different things, but sometimes people use different language when actually they mean the same thing. We can get into huge debates about whether we mean equality or independent living or human rights. And sometimes it is the same stuff we are talking about using different language – and that isn't helpful.

There is a disconnect sometimes in terms of talk, action, impact. You know, we are sat here today in these rather gorgeous surroundings, under chandeliers, in a very beautiful building and as often with difficult access. That is symbolic of something I won't go to into, but what are we doing here? We are here talking about equality and inequality. We are talking about people's lives out there. You know, we are all sat here, it is all very nice. Meanwhile, there are disabled people out there who are being left in nappies for ten hours at a time, because there's no funding for services that mean people can go to the toilet when they want to go to. This is the kind of civilised society that we live in. This is the reality of people's lives.

It feels so remote to me from us lot sat here today. Yes it is great, we are having this very interesting discussion, it is fascinating charting the

evolution and manifestations of inequality and how all these things intersect, but what about the impact? What difference is it going to make in the world out there? Well, I think what are we doing here? What difference is it going to make to people's real lives out there, because if we aren't doing anything at all except have a self-indulgent time of it, then we should do something slightly more useful with our lives.

Finally, I also wonder if the consequences of social disconnection can be a misunderstanding of the problem. Whether we are sat here today is part of that. Is it the problem that we don't understand the problem, or is that we are responding to it in the wrong kind of way, asking the wrong people the wrong questions? Is it about failing to join up across sectors and disciplines etc.? What is the issue here? Do we really in this room not know what the problems are? Do the politicians really not know what to do about inequality? I found myself drafting a vision to equality, and I had a flash back to 2002. Yes I have written all this before, accessible transport, housing etc. Maybe at some point I will think this is a tactic that is working. It may be that we are not translating or pitching things at the right level. I think we need to understand how change happens and from my former experience as a civil servant it is about waiting for the alignments of planets – a moment when something pops up on the political agenda and you take that thing off the shelf, dust it down and run with it. That is how change happens, not through better evidence or a better definition of the problem. Sometimes it is about putting the people on the sharp end. It would have been good for a few more of them to be here today.