Celebrating friendship thanks to the National



Preswylydd â Syndrom Down yn cymryd rhan yn y prosiect Clywed y Cyn-Guddiedig

Led by Mencap Cymru, the Welsh arm of the UK Learning Disability organisation Royal Mencap Society, Our Social Networks will allow people who have for so long been denied a voice, to recall and celebrate their experiences.

Thanks to National Lottery players, people with learning disabilities will be involved in the interpretation of their own history and design of public exhibitions – representing themselves for the first time, where historically a family member, friend or medical professional would have undertaken the role.

Building on the success of a previous Lottery funded project, Hidden Now Heard, the aim of this new social history project is to tell the stories of sixty individuals with a learning disability that will be shared via an online museum, interactive pop up exhibitions in places such as Cardiff International Airport and the Deiniol Centre in Bangor as well as a mobile app.

According to Wayne Crocker, Director of Mencap Cymru this is a ground breaking project. “The award given by HLF is a significant endorsement of the need to both capture the hidden histories of people with a learning disability in Wales but more importantly to help organisations like Mencap Cymru use the stories we uncover to influence Welsh Government and society at large. People with a learning disability and their families make up 5% of the population in Wales and their experiences need to be heard.”

Working across Wales, England and Northern Ireland Mencap has always challenged society’s perceptions of learning disability and over the last 70 years has helped to change attitudes, influence policy and has constantly fought to empower individuals. While some previous academic studies have referred to the friendships, relationships and sexuality of people with learning disabilities, this will be the first time personal testimonies of those with direct experiences will have been recorded.

Cllr Sara Pickard, Project Officer on previous similar projects explains why this project is important to her as someone with Down's syndrome. “I found working on the Hidden Now Heard project very interesting as it was the first time I had any experience of an oral history project. Being able to interview an older generation of people with a learning disability about their past was an eye-opening experience. While some things have changed for the better I could see that in many ways the experiences of people with learning disabilities, like me are still the same.”

Richard Bellamy is Head of HLF in Wales and recognises the importance of such a project. “If we consider what is showcased within our museum collections generally, the heritage of people with learning disabilities is greatly under-represented. Now, thanks to National Lottery players, we can go some way to rectifying that situation by raising awareness and improving public understanding. The training of Wales wide volunteers and recruitment of project ambassadors will ensure the impact is felt across the country and it will be a major step towards documenting the experiences of people with learning disabilities everywhere.”

In addition to supporting and training 60 volunteers and recruiting three ambassadors and a project officer with a learning disability, an online museum will also be developed along with a mobile app to access all the stories developed and a short film to be shared online.