



Meet Linda Wylie, Digital Education Support Coordinator in the Mixed Methods team in our Improvement Directorate. She tells us how disability equality affects her, how she got to where she is today, and where she was born, which colleagues might be surprised to discover about her.

Tell us a bit about your current work:

I provide first and second line support for the Quality Improvement (QI) Learning system where the Massive Open and Online Courses (MOOC)s are hosted () – primarily the Improvement Fundamentals courses, and support for the MOOC School course.

How does disability equality affect you?

Knowing that, even though my disability is due to a long-term condition (LTC), this is recognised as being part of disability equality.

We recently marked Disability History Month (18 November – 20 December). Why is Disability History Month important to you? What does it mean to you?

I feel the most difficult issue is first being recognised as having a disability due to a LTC – it is invisible to those who do not know me.

I hope Disability History Month can help people to understand more about what disability means in all its formats, whether immediately obvious or unknown, and that each person who has a disability is not their disability – they are still a person who is working, contributing and part of the everyday the same as everybody else.

Having acquired dyslexia (from having neurosurgery to remove a tumour from my pituitary gland), knowing that attitudes to dyslexia and many other disabilities have come a long way, is so important. Every example of where anybody who has a

disability is seen as an individual like everybody else is amazing. I hope one day, labels which define people will no longer be used and the person is seen first, last and always.

How would you describe to someone who doesn't know you, what it's like to be you?

I am a very determined person. This has got me through many difficulties whether connected to how my LTC affects me, both mentally and physically, or other challenges we all face. I care greatly about other people and I am very happy if I can help others but sometimes this is to the detriment of myself. I am sad I cannot do the things I used to be able to before my LTC changed everything but I try hard to find ways of making this into a positive as much as possible.

What's important to you, in a working environment?

To be recognised by the organisation for the work I do and the effort I make. I get this recognition in my immediate team but my job does make me feel a bit isolated sometimes.

What helps you, in a working environment?

Being appreciated. It makes such a difference and I am lucky I do get this in my job from my immediate team. I do sometimes wonder how my contribution fits in with the wider work of the NHS but I hope that will change with the initiatives around improvement, and the important role it has.

How does your team include you?

Apart from the work I do with my immediate team, I get to help others in the wider team. This helps to bring a sense of inclusion, not just with the work I do for my managers. I like the weekly team meetings which allow us to be ourselves, and I like to be involved in these. I think the rest of the team worries a bit when I am quiet...

How does the organisation benefit from having you as a colleague?

I have a cross-section of experience which enables me to cover several less conventional jobs, such as computer technical skills and combining these with direct customer service in supporting NHS colleagues around the country. I also do a bit of teaching assistance for live courses and I update the learning experience system we use for the MOOC courses. I'm full of ideas to do with the work and quite happy to put these forward, and I don't mind if they are not used. I'm often

asked how to do things with apps on computers (I'm a bit of a 'go to' person) and if I don't know the answer I will do my best to find it. I don't like to give up when trying to sort something out – my determination kicks in. I can also be quite funny as well. Well, silly anyway...

How did you get to where you are today?

After being diagnosed with a pituitary adenoma and having neurosurgery, I decided to finally do something about the education I had missed out on when a teenager. This was the push I needed to do it, instead of talking about it, so I enrolled on something called the Women's Access to Information Technology (WAIT) course at De Montfort University. This was a full-time course for women over 25 who might otherwise not have access or the opportunity to learn about computing. It was very forward thinking at the time and well thought out, with three classes so parents could fit it in around child caring responsibilities. It was brilliant! After this I went on to get a Higher National Diploma (HND) and degree in Business Information Technology, mainly around computer systems development. I graduated at the age of 51 and got a job supporting users of a bespoke system called 'The Improvement System' (for improvement project management) in the original NHS Improvement. It was my degree which helped me get the job. From there I moved to NHS England, and finally into the role I have now.

How do you champion equality, diversity and inclusion in your current role? What difference have you made?

To be honest, I am not sure exactly what I do. I try to be supportive to all those I come into contact with and promote that we are all equal, with the right to be individuals. I believe strongly in a person's right to dignity and speak out if this is threatened in some way.

I believe an individual person's dignity is made up of many things which are important to them: their beliefs, family, upbringing, the country they come from, what is important to them, what they will not tolerate. When you apply it to everyday life, this can equate to religion, sexuality, culture. If you start to strip these away, you are attacking the very being of that person and chipping away at part of that person's dignity.

I also feel where behaviour threatens this, it is important not just to work with the person who is threatened but all those concerned – including those who are acting negatively towards others. You can't be inclusive if you don't include all parties. Excluding those with unwelcome behaviour is not going to solve any problems.

I was bullied at school and the person who bullied me, came to me to ask to be a friend. I now understand she had her reasons for how she behaved. In the WAIT class, I worked with a fellow student even though they had been horrible to me. It stopped the way she behaved toward me and we became friends.

Of course, this approach doesn't work for all bullies, but in some cases inclusion can help stop negative behaviour.

What's the one thing we can all do to champion equality, diversity and inclusion in your view?

Think first about how you would feel if you were excluded for a personal trait, value or disability. Do you want others to feel that way because of something you may do?

What's your typical weekend look like?

Resting. More resting, feeding the cats, and sometimes a splurge of making things – I love crafting.

What's your favourite food?

Just about anything I can eat with family and friends, except peppers – they really do not like me. COVID-19 has stopped me getting together with my sisters and I really miss seeing them all.

What would your colleagues be surprised to discover about you?

I was actually born in a disused World War II American army hut. It was so leaky, when the council inspectors came around to award the first council houses built in the village, the sight of me in a tin bath in front of the fire, at only a few months old, clinched the deal. This was great because we got a council house with fields behind it.