



CAPABILITY SCOTLAND CELEBRATES SUCCESS FOR LANDMARK HATE CRIME BILL

3 June 2009

Today's passing by the Scottish Parliament of sees the culmination of many years campaigning by Capability Scotland. It is therefore a source of great hope and celebration for Capability and disabled people across Scotland.

The Bill will give disabled people and people from the LGBT community who are victims of hate crime the same protections under the law as those offered to victims of hate crimes in relation to race or religion. It will provide police, prosecutors and courts with the means of tackling the crimes of prejudice directed against people who have so far been ignored by existing hate crime legislation.

The proportion of disabled people who experience hate crime each year is alarming. In 2004 Capability Scotland conducted a survey of disabled people in Scotland which showed that 47% of those who had responded had experienced hate crime because of their disability. Almost three-quarters of those who reported being frightened or attacked had experienced verbal abuse and intimidation and just over a third of incidents reported were physical attacks.

Alan Dickson, Chief Executive of Capability said, "This is quite simply unacceptable. Hate crime is a violent expression of intolerance and for it still to be so prevalent is a sad indictment on our society."

Indeed many disabled people who have experienced hate crime have been unwilling to report it. There is a fear of reprisals due to the belief that nothing can be done by the courts to deal with the malice and ill-will which motivates these crimes.

Caroline's experiences of hate crime are typical of those of many disabled people:

“I have been subjected to name-calling and threatening behaviour on several occasions – at one point it was happening once a month, often at bus stops at night. Once I was on the bus when someone threatened to slit my throat.

“Another time I was at my local bus-stop when these young guys bumped into me. One had a metal pole in his hand and shook it in my face. I was on my way to a night out with friends and when I got there, I burst into tears. It was really scary.

“When it did happen I reported it to my local police station. But I waited until the abusers had gone as I didn’t want them caught. I know they are breaking the law but I wouldn’t want to take anyone to court as I live on my own and I am too scared of the repercussions.”

Caroline is unable to walk long distances and is reliant on public transport to get to college and maintain her active social life and involvement in the community. However because of her experiences she is now too scared to use the bus having to depend on taxis instead. She has also been forced to avoid certain areas.

Alan Dickson concludes, “Sadly Caroline’s experiences are not unusual. This kind of hatred scares and humiliates people and has a huge impact on their daily lives – even to the extent of having to change job or home. Tellingly, our research revealed that most people are not confident that they can get help to stop the attacks. That’s why we need the strengthened legislation which the new Bill promises and why Capability campaigned so long to achieve this.”

ENDS

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NOTES TO EDITORS:

Since there has been no amendments or oppositions at any of the previous stages, it is expected that the bill will pass today without opposition.

Capability Scotland

Capability Scotland campaigns with, and provides services to, disabled children and adults across Scotland, supporting them to achieve equality and have choice and control in their lives.