

TSSA Disability Working Group Mini Conference, 16-17/05/2009 Torquay

The conference started well with a presentation from Narmadha Thiranagama (*TUC woman's equality officer*). Her interesting and thought provoking talk highlighted the commonality between the different strands of the equality movement.

Then Dough Blundell (*Executive Committee member for the London region*) gave us a talk on the buddy scheme that London Underground had recently implemented. This had seen a number of people with learning difficulties being given the opportunity to work temporarily, on the underground alongside "buddies". These "buddies" were employees who acted as mentors for the temporary staff with learning difficulties, on a one to one basis. We were also shown a short video presentation in which both the mentors & the mentored, told us about their experiences on the scheme. After the scheme end, 4 of the temporary employees successfully applied for permanent positions with London Underground.

Then on the second day Val Stansfeald, the then TSSA equalities officer ran a discussion on the disability discrimination act and how this related to employment.

The DWG chair Pauline Mcardle, ran a session on "preferred language" in relation to disability. This started with a flip chart presentation and continued into a brain storming session in which we were all asked to call out terms that referred to people with disabilities, and these were recorded on a flipchart. Then we went through them one at a time asking whether they were acceptable terms or not and if not why not and what was an acceptable alternative.

It was agreed by all that this information should be rolled out across the Union.

As has become a tradition at these events, there was a beautiful cake with Celebration written on it in icing.

In conclusion the event was attended by 49 delegates with several new faces and the speakers were stimulating and engaging. The attendees were very enthusiastic and expressed a desire that the event should be repeated next year.

Report by
Ray Spiteri