



**2016:
Channel 4's
Year of
Disability**

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Introduction

Diversity, in its myriad forms, is at the very core of our programme making; in other words, it's embedded in Channel 4's DNA. It's the lifeblood that fuels our creativity.

And our commitment to diversity has never been stronger. In 2016, our Paralympic year, the Creative Diversity team delivered the ground-breaking Year of Disability. The concept was simple: the Year of Disability would help create a 'new normal'. Our mission was to make a real, measurable difference. Off-screen we progressed the careers of more than 20 disabled mid-level talent in 20 of our biggest suppliers. And on-screen we doubled the number of disabled people appearing in over 20 of our most popular shows.

Vitaly, the success of the scheme was only made possible by working in close partnership with our key indie suppliers – and of course the very best off-screen and on-screen talent.

But it doesn't end here. Our expectations are ambitious. Our aims are to continue to grow the careers of disabled talent both on and off-screen, in a meaningful, sustainable fashion. And to celebrate this country's diversity and creativity in all of its glory.

We are all different, we are all unique, and together we'll change the face of television.

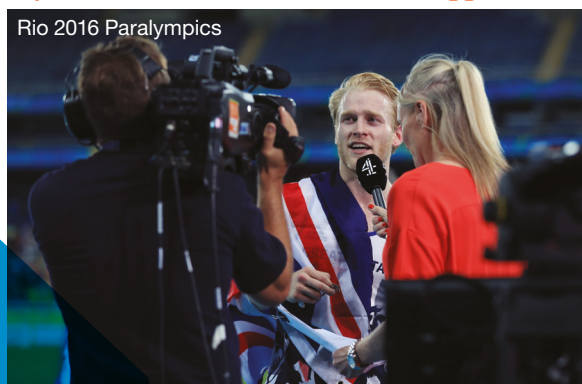
Ade Rawcliffe
Nina Bhagwat
Ramy El-Bergamy
Creative Diversity Team

On-screen talent: Writing the wrong

Channel 4 hasn't so much commissioned a rewrite. It's torn up the script when it comes to the way disability is portrayed on-screen.

2016 was a defining moment for the industry. It was Channel 4's Year of Disability – when the channel pledged to cast even more disabled people as actors, experts, presenters or contributors on-screen in its biggest shows – and the year when it uniquely broadcast over 600 hours from the Rio 2016 Paralympics.

In 2016 Channel 4 doubled disabled representation in over 20 of its biggest shows



But the representation of disability isn't always about superhuman achievement. "It's important for society in general to see a disabled person just living their life like they would normally," says Amy Conachan. Amy recently joined the *Hollyoaks* cast to star as science teacher Courtney Campbell. "I'd like to play parts that are much more about the character, casting me as an actor rather than the fact I'm in a wheelchair," she says. "And this part is nothing to do with the fact I'm in a wheelchair."

Ade Rawcliffe, Creative Diversity Manager at the broadcaster, agrees. "We have a duty to reflect viewers' lives, especially so in our mainstream programming." She adds: "It can transform attitudes to disability, it enriches our content and gives us a unique point of view."

That unique take on life is apparent across much of the output. Nearly two dozen of the most popular shows, from *Gogglebox* to *Location, Location, Location*, and *Naked Attraction* to *Countdown* via *SAS: Who Dares Wins* and *The Secret Life of 5 Year Olds* have all featured disability.

Daisy Mason, who has cerebral palsy, became a firm favourite in *The Secret Life of 5 Year Olds*. Her mother, Lucy, was keen for Daisy to take part. "I do hope it will raise awareness for disabled children and it will also raise awareness for parents not to hold their children back from anything. That it doesn't matter what your child looks like or how tall they are or whether they have a disability or not, they have a right to be a child and that's that. Don't hold them back."

Also...

A Place in the Sun
Gogglesprogs
Naked Attraction
Tattoo Fixers
One Born Every Minute
World of Weird
Supershoppers

The Island



It's a message that's found time and again. Hannah Campbell was a standout participant in *The Island*. "I wanted to go and do this extreme programme to show my daughters that if I could do it then they could." The former corporal lost her lower left leg when serving in Iraq, but she left the show early for other reasons: a massive tropical storm triggered Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. "Of all the things I would have to come off that island for, I didn't want Iraq to be the reason. But it made me realise I need to talk about my trauma more and the feedback I got from the show has been amazing."

“I wanted to go and do this extreme programme to show my daughters that if I could do it then they could.”

Hannah Campbell
Participant in *The Island*

On-screen talent: Writing the wrong continued



Feedback was something that worried the parents of Isaac McCormick. Isaac, who has Tourette's syndrome, appeared on *Gogglebox* with his family. His mother, Georgia, had firm views though: "We said from the start, if we get any abuse over Isaac or it turns sour, we'll pull out. But it's been really well executed. So hats off to the production company, they've done a great job."

Isaac added: "I think people know what Tourette's is, but there are so many misconceptions and so many stereotypes. For example, they think that everyone with Tourette's will swear, but actually, it's only 10 per cent of people with Tourette's who will."

Come Dine with Me contestant Gary Mazin found the physical experience of making the programme revelatory. "It was the feeling of being accepted and welcomed into the show and being made to feel like part of the team that I most enjoyed. For once my disability (blindness) wasn't my defining



...even more

Location, Location, Location
Fill Your House For Free
Countdown
Chewing Gum series 2
Come Dine with Me
Celebrity First Dates

“ For once my disability (blindness) wasn't my defining quality.

Gary Mazin
Come Dine with Me contestant

quality; it's always going to be a big part of me and my personality, but I was allowed the freedom to truly be myself and this really very rarely happens."

It's a sentiment that resonates with *Hollyoaks* star Amy: "It doesn't always have to be about the fact they're in a wheelchair or have a disability. I'm sick of seeing the whole 'I'm disabled so therefore my life is crap' thing. That's so untrue for most people I know who have a disability and for myself."



First Dates



Gogglebox



SAS: Who Dares Wins



Secret Life Of...

Channel 4's progressive attitude towards disability on-screen reflects that concept in controversial programmes such as *Naked Attraction*.

Liverpudlian Matty Roche stripped off on the first programme; although the good-looking artist and performer wasn't so happy about exposing his tattoo. "The part of my body I hate most is my tattoo. I got it when I was on holiday in Thailand, but I'm a different person now." Tellingly his favourite body part is his prosthetic right leg. "I see my leg as a strength rather than a weakness."

Positivity around disability issues is found elsewhere and not only in programming. "The response we've had from people online and on Twitter is just amazing," says Claire Preston, mother of sisters Emma and Brooke. Emma, who has Down's syndrome, became a runaway *Gogglesprogs* success with her sister as they hilariously shared their views on TV. Claire adds: "Creating awareness of Down's syndrome is an important part of it and showing that Emma has no limits will hopefully inspire other kids. We're

immensely proud of both our kids for taking part in this project."

And war veterans Kirk Bowett and Jez Scarrett felt pride in what they achieved too after partnering up together to star in *Hunted*. "Both Jez and I have been through life-changing experiences," says Kirk. "He lost his leg and I lost my arm in Iraq. After that, you embrace every opportunity.

"Despite my injury, I live a normal life now, but I was motivated to see if I could still do this kind of stuff. I think it's our responsibility as veterans to keep our experiences in the public eye. Whether we're injured mentally or physically, we need people to understand."

The programme makers at Channel 4 couldn't agree more.

Talent behind the camera

Who?
Alastair Meichan

Occupation
Researcher

Company
Sundog



Stepping out

Alastair Meichan took his first steps into the TV industry after graduating. He was soon spotted as being ideal material for the Channel 4 production training scheme ('PTS'). "I'd always wanted to be in TV, ever since my teenage years," he said. "But it seemed a world away from what I thought I was capable of at that time."

His experience on the scheme has been invaluable. "It did so much to build up my confidence and made me more comfortable in the TV environment." An observation that Executive Producer Patrick Ruddy of Princess Productions wholeheartedly agreed with. "Working with Alastair on *The Superhumans Show*, it was hard to imagine it was his first job in television. He took to the work like a complete natural and was a really valued member of the team."

Alastair has cerebral palsy, "But I think I've got it fairly mildly; you can see I walk with a limp, but it's nothing in comparison to a lot of other people." His can-do attitude is winning. "I happily live with it, perhaps that knocks the assumption that everyone with a disability is unhappy with their lot."

Currently Alastair is working as a researcher, "But I hope to be an assistant producer in one or two years' time, leading through to producer and series producer; I really enjoy the production side of things... ultimately I want to make a big entertainment show!"

Patrick reckoned that just might be on the cards. "I have no doubt that Alastair has found his calling in television, he was an absolute pleasure to work with."

“ Quite simply, Channel 4's
Year of Disability has
changed my life.

Alastair Meichan,
researcher

Who?
Alexandra Burke

Occupation
Assistant Producer

Company
Tellycopter

A scheme for the top



Living with a significant disability can deter people from trying to forge a career in TV. A situation Alexandra Burke is only too aware of. “My eyesight is a problem; I have a degenerative disease and can’t drive because of it. So I could never get into TV through the traditional route of being a runner.”

Taking part in a Channel 4 PTS and working on *Restoration Man* was the break she needed. “I wouldn’t be where I am today without it. It gave me a leg up and helped with contacts.”

Contacts that included Fenia Vardanis at Melinamedia. “What’s fantastic about Alex is that she’s so clued up on telly, she’s passionate, particularly so in development. She was streets ahead of everyone else.”

Alexandra has now made it to assistant producer; and significantly met others in a similar situation on her journey. “Every job I’ve had I’ve found another person who’s been on a similar scheme; that’s brilliant.”

Her intuitive feel for popular TV led her naturally into development, but she has her mind on bigger goals.

“ I was given the boost I needed to break the barriers of feeling my disability hindered me from progressing in the TV world.

Alexandra Burke,
assistant producer

“I love development and creating things, but I’ve not got through to that other level yet; I want a show that I can see through to the screen.”

Fenia doesn’t doubt her ambition. “She’s got an instinct about TV, she understands, she just gets it and not just in a single genre. Alex will go all the way; and I wouldn’t be at all surprised if she made a great commissioning editor one day.”

Talent behind the camera

Who?
Camilla Arnold

Occupation
Producer/Director

Company
Flashing Lights



Breaking out of the box

"I'm quite unique and people like that – I bring a new angle and a new way of thinking. I'm also the girl with the big curly hair and the wavy signing hands," joked Producer/Director Camilla Arnold. Camilla now has several documentary films about the deaf under her belt and she's completing her first documentary for Channel 4, a *First Cut* about the Mary Hare School for the deaf. "I'm part of a community that hasn't really been exposed on TV; there's a gap, so I've made it my business to find interesting stories about people who just happen to be deaf, the films aren't about their deafness per se."

Producer/Director and collaborator Clare Johns agrees. "Camilla is brilliant at what she does, pushing that message about deafness through into the mainstream and normalising it along the way. She really opened my eyes."

But Camilla still has battles with those whose eyes are shut. "There can be an old fashioned view of deafness, some people don't see past the disability and want to put me in a box with a label," said Camilla.

So what does the future hold for this dynamic film maker?

"I don't want to be pigeon holed. My ultimate aim is to become a commissioning editor and nurture talent. I'm a good programme maker; but I need to have enough experience behind me before getting there. And I'm looking forward to the day that I hear someone say: 'This is the head of commissioning for documentaries – and by the way she just happens to be deaf!'"

“ The Year of Disability has definitely given me a huge amount of confidence and empowerment as a young disabled woman working in a very tough industry.

Camilla Arnold,
producer/director

Who?
Caroline O'Neill

Occupation
Producer/Director

Company
betty



Sign of success

Award-winning Producer/Director Caroline O'Neill has worked in TV for the past 15 years. That's given her ample opportunity to understand how the industry reacts to disability. "Some companies are anxious about me as a deaf person, so I find it's up to me to persuade them that I can work effectively." Caroline succinctly identified the underlying cause. "They can be scared of disability, especially if they have to spend money to employ me."

The financial worries can be alleviated by sourcing funding from the government's Access to Work scheme. "Through a qualified Registered Sign Language Interpreter, a deaf Producer/Director can participate fully in the working environment, whether on set directing, in the edit, or in a development meeting. A good sign language interpreter will ensure all vital information is conveyed with as minimum a delay as possible."

Currently Caroline is working on a range of ideas for Channel 4 as a development producer at betty. "I don't like to see deaf people marginalised to work only in deaf programming." Her workload bears that out.

“ I feel very strongly that both deaf and disabled people have a lot to offer the TV and film industry, and they are currently under represented both in front of and behind the camera in mainstream television.

Caroline O'Neill,
producer/director

Fellow Producer/Director Camilla Arnold has known and worked with Caroline for six years: "Caroline is one of the very few female deaf producers, very talented, very focused and detail orientated – I felt inspired by her. She was almost my mentor, took me under her wing and has always been very supportive."

But, importantly, it's also Caroline's drive and determination that shines through and defines her as the dynamic producer she is today.

Talent behind the camera

Who?
Cathy Heffernan

Occupation
Development Producer

Company
Postcard Productions



Setting the right tone

“Some people can’t visualise a deaf person working in the TV industry,” said Cathy Heffernan. Fortunately, Executive Producer Richard Bentley at Postcard Productions isn’t one of them. “It’s strange, but I don’t even consider her being deaf. She’s incredibly bright and an amazing person to work with.”

Cathy started her media career as a researcher for Mind the Gap Films in Dublin before moving on to a successful five-year stint at the Guardian. But she had a hankering to get back into TV. “I loved the collaborative work, I really missed it; it’s not the same in print journalism.”

Cathy’s selection for Channel 4’s Investigative Journalism scheme helped her back into the TV industry, where she developed ideas for *Channel 4 News*. Her disability wasn’t an obstacle. “My deafness isn’t particularly difficult, it’s different, so I approach things differently.”

Cathy’s acute deafness means she works with an interpreter, especially as much of her work is done over the phone. It’s a situation that brings its own unique issues.

“I was concerned I was missing out on the details,” she reflected; “...on those subtle nuances and changes of tone in voice, so that means I have to work very closely with my interpreter.”

It is a relationship that works very well and Richard is impressed with the results. “When we discuss our work she is always so on top of things.”

And her work developing documentary ideas for Postcard Productions is moving from strength to strength.

“Cathy has positioned herself really well, she’s developing really strong ideas and structures,” added Richard. “She’ll be incredibly successful and go far.”

“ I didn’t want to be pigeon
holed in deaf media.

Cathy Heffernan,
development producer

Who?
Craig Langran

Occupation
Researcher

Company
betty

The strategic player



“I wasn’t diagnosed with dyspraxia and dyslexia until I was 18, so I’d already subconsciously developed coping strategies,” said Craig Langran. “The condition affects my cognitive functions, and although my work is different from others, the outcome will be the same.”

Craig copes admirably with his disability, but it’s not always easy.

“I don’t normally disclose it when I go for a job, although in the past I’ve been provided with additional support when an employer found out.” Like when he worked as a researcher on *Tricks of the Restaurant Trade* at *betty*.

But because dyslexia and dyspraxia are invisible conditions, clumsy assumptions can be made about Craig’s ability.

To counteract the negative stereotypes Craig goes that extra mile. “Perhaps I’m slower than others at certain jobs, but there’s a flip-side. My condition helps lateral thinking and creativity; I think outside the box, which is great for TV.”

He’s also devised strategies for successfully coping within a busy television environment. “I’m really careful to take notes in meetings

“ Some people feel I’m making excuses – that’s the stigma of my situation, like it is for many disabilities I suppose.

Craig Langran,
researcher

in an effort to absorb whatever is going on.” Craig is no slouch though, and is certainly not going to let either dyslexia or dyspraxia hold him back from his chosen career. “In the future I’d like to be working on more current affairs and news programmes, content with a journalistic bent. Ultimately I want to be looking at these issues as a director; TV presents an opportunity to set the tone of debate that’s unique, and that could apply to disability too.”

Talent behind the camera

Who?
Daniel Brown

Occupation
Researcher

Company
IWC



Getting an edge ahead

Daniel Brown's passion for the written word led him to a pop-up Channel 4 event in Glasgow and onto a researcher placement at IWC Media. "I'm a writer, I always have been," he mused.

Gail Birnie, Head of Production talent at IWC Media, was impressed right from the start. "He's great and came through the rigorous interview process with flying colours – he was easily the best candidate!"

And it's clear Daniel isn't afraid to work hard for his goals. "I have to be that little bit better, have an edge I suppose. Meningitis left me deaf as an infant, the doctors thought I'd never speak, but my parents were determined and stubborn and here I am, the only thing that's different about me is my hearing."

And ambition maybe... "I like that he has ambition and passion for his writing as well as his job here, it's admirable," said Gail.

Daniel is no longer a trainee and is now working as a fully fledged researcher. He's also embracing the culture of TV; "I'm already creating a network," he reckoned.

"In a creative industry you never know who you are talking to or standing next to."

In the meantime, Daniel intends to build on his craft while working enthusiastically as a researcher. "Channel 4 and IWC have given me validation and a lot of hope, it makes me more confident... and maybe I'll get a writing break tomorrow, you never know!"

“ Channel 4 are keen to develop and nurture those who have managed to make something of themselves, in spite of whatever obstacles lie in their way.

Daniel Brown,
researcher

Who?
David Proud

Occupation
Actor/Writer

Company
Kudos



Standing proud

“Generally producers are afraid of one thing when it comes to disability,” said up-and-coming writer David Proud... “tone.”

Not that David is afraid of much. Having started his career as an actor, he made the jump to writing for theatre and TV five years ago. Recently he worked on *Humans*, series 2. Not that David thought he’d ever have a media career as a youngster because of spina bifida.

Ironically his disability has helped him. “I’d say spina bifida has made me a lot more ambitious, I’ve had to use my brain a little bit and think myself into what I wanted to do with my life.”

“He’s incredibly determined...” observed writer Paul Viragh, “and great fun to work with; there are no barriers with David.”

David’s lack of barriers, openness and passion mark him out as a writer to watch. “I’m happy to write about disability as much as I am about non-disability. And if I’m writing about disability I can help; I’ve got experience and that can relieve the fears of some producers.”

“ I wish every year could be a Year of Disability, it’s a perfect example of how the whole industry could participate in career-focused development.

David Proud,
actor/writer

But more than that, he’s got something to say. “New stories, new characters, surely that’s what we all want? Everyone’s life story and journey is different – that’s what makes the world so amazing.”

Paul agreed. “David has strong stories to tell, he’s extremely talented and will have an exceptional career in the film and TV industry. He’s a comic, a funny guy, open to light and dark.”

Talent behind the camera

Who?
Emily Saunders-Madden

Occupation
Researcher

Company
Twenty Twenty

Life in the fast lane



Emily Saunders-Madden is someone who likes to do things at a pace. “I can read six novels a week for fun,” she said, “because I can get quite tired, I have to do it quickly.” This super-fast coping mechanism has produced some unique benefits. “I’ve developed an incredible memory... and that makes me a great researcher!” As she proved on *Roald Dahl’s Most Marvellous Book*.

Emily has cerebral palsy and spastic diplegia and her energy levels can plummet, hence her need to conserve energy. “I use four times the energy of everyone else doing bugger all,” she laughs.

Lawrence Hourahane, Production and Planning Executive for BBC Wales Sport, was aware of Emily’s condition. “She told us in advance that she might need periods of rest, and it all worked out fine. In fact I’m sure some people working here knew nothing about Emily’s disability. She hit the ground running and brought new life to the department.”

Maybe that’s just as she’d like it. “A lot of us are still trying to ride the wave of getting disability on and off-screen – I just want to be like everyone else, normalise it.”

Twenty Twenty Television recently picked Emily for her first researcher job. But it’s still early days; her determination, charisma and IQ of 138 are bound to make her an irresistible addition to many more production companies.

“People with disability,” she reckoned, “become extraordinary. We’re not superhuman, we just evolve differently.”

“ Finally, a major channel is seeing disabled talent for what it is, instead of being blindsided by labels and a tick box system.

Emily Saunders-Madden,
researcher

Who?
Florence Tasker

Occupation
Graphic Designer

Company
What Larks

Going with the Flo



Florence Tasker had high hopes after graduating with a BA in Theatre Design; she assumed a job wouldn't be far off. It wasn't to be. "It came as a shock, I was wrong, there was no work in theatre at all," she reflected.

So she developed a new direction within TV, and found herself working on series 7 of *Doctor Who* under art director Paul Spriggs.

Florence has since moved quickly to establish herself in TV Graphic Design. Although it's not all been plain sailing.

"Because of my deafness I can't use the phone easily and I've developed a bit of a phonephobia; it's amazing how much of my work involves being on the phone."

Luckily, technology in this area has been a boon. "I use Skype and FaceTime; it's much easier if I can see someone when they're speaking."

It's proved to be useful for all concerned, such as when she worked on Channel 4's *Damned*. "I had a FaceTime chat with my boss; I not only talked but I could also show him my work. It was great, and a better way of working for all of us in a visual industry."

“ The Year of Disability will bring more diverse talent into the industry and with it an expansion of ideas, boundaries being pushed and improved attitudes.

Florence Tasker,
graphic designer

She also uses a clever piece of kit called a Roger Pen. It acts as a cutting-edge microphone and is especially useful in noisy situations.

"When the crew on my last show heard I needed one, they had a whip-round so I could buy it. The support was wonderful."

Talent behind the camera

Who?
Jamie O'Leary

Occupation
Producer/Director

Company
CPL



Another take

Award-winning producer/director Jamie O'Leary has had severe myopia all his life. "My glasses were incredibly thick as a kid. My new contact lenses were a big deal then. If I lost one the whole school stopped and had to get on their hands and knees looking for it!" Jamie reckoned he wasn't academic, but he went on to do a BTEC and degree in Media. "I couldn't have done anything else," he joked.

"I had a showreel and came out fully formed... or so I naively thought!" Then, through his involvement at Channel 4, he got fast tracked.

Alex Fraser, chief creative at 7Wonder, first met Jamie when working at Maverick 20 years ago. They went on to create the groundbreaking *I'm Spazticus* together. "*Spazticus* was noisy and provocative and ran just the right side of the line. Jamie was brilliant on that show," she remembered.

"Having a disability informs my work," he said, "there's an empathy, it's disarming, disability can break down walls. And in terms of storytelling, disability tells us a lot about people." Alex reflected "You could say it gives him permission to go where an able-bodied director might

find difficulties but I'd be doing him a huge disservice to say that it was his disability that formed the show; fundamentally he's a brilliant director and an agent provocateur."

Jamie's star is still in the ascendant; it's because of his unique take on life. "I think sometimes I literally do see things differently; like shadows in the middle of the night..."

“ Channel 4 have been incredibly supportive, not just through their diversity department but through the commissioning processes too.

Jamie O'Leary,
producer/director

Who?
Julie Shaw

Occupation
Series Producer

Company
betty

The common touch



Julie Shaw's passion and enthusiasm is infectious; as is her understanding of factual TV and current affairs. "We worked together on *Tonight with Trevor McDonald*," said Andrew Marr's editor Rob Burley. "She's easily one of the best people I've worked with. Julie has that special thing, a keen understanding of what viewers want, of what ordinary people engage with. That may sound simple but it's a rare ability."

Julie wears such praise lightly. "I wanted to pick stories that meant things to people, and for them to be as entertaining as possible, like *Tricks of the Restaurant Trade*."

Her TV career was given a boost when Channel 4 helped fund her post graduate course in Broadcast Journalism. "That was really significant; my family couldn't afford it, dad was a postman and mum a cleaner, they certainly didn't have the cash to help me through my studies."

But that wasn't the only obstacle this award-winning producer has overcome. Julie has a rare condition called Klippel-Trenaunay syndrome. "I can't remember a year in childhood without an operation and a stay in

“ I think disability initiatives are important, and to be applauded, but it's important for broadcasters to continue to recognise the value of employing disabled people.

Julie Shaw,
series producer

hospital," she said. Her right leg was amputated above the knee when she was aged one.

Julie's chronic condition has also influenced her appreciation of the way disability is represented on-screen. "Yes, I'm frustrated about what little disability appears on TV – TV's attitude to disability is different to other minorities; with disability it becomes pivotal to its inclusion. There's no excuse," she added, warming to her theme; "one in five of us are disabled."

Compassion and rare ability? The world needs more Julies.

Talent behind the camera

Who?
Liam Holt

Occupation
Editor

Company
Boomerang

Sporting chance



“I got into TV in a random way. I originally started in music thinking that I’d probably teach; but it wasn’t for me,” reflected Liam Holt. It was while working as an Audience Research Assistant at BBC Wales that he heard about the Channel 4 PTS. Soon he was working as a researcher on the London 2012 Paralympics. “It was great, the perfect combination of my research skills and my passion for sport.” Liam is an avid participant of wheelchair basketball. “I’m paralysed from the waist down; it’s not as clear cut as a broken spine, but I’m paraplegic.”

“It’s great that in the build-up and since London 2012 there’s a real platform for people of diversity to carve themselves a career in broadcasting.”

Liam Holt,
editor

Executive Producer Sharon Bennett works closely with him at Boom Cymru TV. “I don’t notice his disability, of course he’s in a wheelchair, but it’s irrelevant.”

It wasn’t long before Liam had progressed from researching via presenting to editing. “I really enjoy editing; I love creating and moulding stories and getting to use my first passion, music, atmospherically.”

Sharon couldn’t be more pleased. “He’s a joy to work with, he’s keen, enthusiastic and learns quickly. I’ve seen him grow a lot, especially in the last year. That’s been very much in our plan to get him to that point as an editor, it’s been done through a careful and considered way.”

Liam has found his niche. “I’m totally at home in TV, I feel passionate about it and now I’ve had my first full editor credits on *Posh Pawn*.”

“He’s ready now for different things as an editor,” said Sharon, “he’s a very talented man.”

Who?
Naomi Atkinson

Occupation
Production Coordinator

Company
North One Television



Making a home run

Naomi Atkinson has a rare connective tissue disorder, Ehlers-Danlos syndrome. It creates constant pain in all of her joints from head to toe and especially her back. A disability like Naomi's is hidden; "because of that sometimes the industry takes the easy way out. In some places I became the 'disabled girl' if I had days off, because they didn't see me working from home."

While working at ITN, she had no such problems. "ITN Productions were very good, they nurtured me and understood my condition, giving me the opportunity for late starts or working from home."

ITN Production Manager John Keyes remembers her fondly. "I didn't know until she told me that she'd got this problem. Yes, it did create some restrictions, but she never ever let it get in the way of work. If she was having a bad day then she could always work from home, so much can be done that way on the phone or with FaceTime."

Naomi thrived. "I made myself indispensable, there was so much going on in documentaries and news. I loved it."

“ Channel 4 are at the forefront of recognising that a disability doesn't define a person.

Naomi Atkinson,
production coordinator

Now Naomi works at North One Television as Production Coordinator on programmes such as *Speed with Guy Martin* and *Our Guy in China* as well as concurrently training to be a production manager. "They have been great, they've actively progressed me to the next level through various training courses."

Her success is no surprise to John. "As a production manager her attitude will be her greatest strength. It takes someone with the right attitude to drive a programme and deliver it, and she has that in spades."

Talent behind the camera

Who?
Rhiannon Lucas

Occupation
Researcher

Company
Twenty Twenty



Getting to the heart of the matter

Rhiannon Lucas came into the world of TV and hit the ground running. It wasn't long before she got her first job at a post production company. "I loved it! Currently I'm working in casting, dealing with all different types of people, finding their stories and trying to identify the ones that will work best on-screen."

Her new life as a freelancer really appeals to her. "It's not for everyone I know, but I love meeting new people, freelancing is part of the buzz and excitement!"

Abi Bourne is currently an Assistant Producer working with Rhiannon at Mentorn Media. "Rhiannon's a real go-getter," she said, "it doesn't take long for her to get a handle on things."

Her go-getting attitude is the perfect foil to her underlying disability. "I have Holt-Oram syndrome, it's a genetic deformity that affects the growth of my arms and heart." Born without a thumb on her left hand and heart defects, Rhiannon's since had reconstructive surgery to create a thumb out of her index finger and had a pacemaker fitted.

"Occasionally I'll feel tightness in my chest; if I feel I'm going to have a funny five minutes I'll sit down until my heart returns to normal. Or I might need physical exertion, like running up stairs, to get my heart beating faster again."

But none of this is holding Rhiannon back. "Eventually I'd like to be a producer," she said, "with my own team, now that would be cool."

“ It was a case of me getting my foot through the door.

Rhiannon Lucas,
researcher

Who?
Richard Butchins

Occupation
Producer/Director

Company
Hardcash Productions

Havin' a butcher's



Award-winning documentary Producer and Director Richard Butchins is well aware of the issues around disability in the TV industry. "I am disabled, but it's not something I wave a flag about," he said.

Richard has made a string of highly successful programmes, some of which have touched on disability. His Channel 4 *Dispatches* programme *Britain on Benefits* is a case in point. "Yes, it made a bit of a splash, questions were asked in the Houses of Parliament..."

Presenter Ade Adepitan worked with Richard on that show. "He's an interesting character; first time I met him I thought he's a cantankerous old git! But he's a really, really good guy, he's got a very dry sense of humour and says it how he sees it."

Maybe that's the key to Richard. "The thing about disability is that it doesn't have a cultural identity, therefore disability doesn't have ethnicity, culture, age or gender. And remember, anyone can become disabled..."

Bringing that understanding into mainstream programme making is clever. Richard added, "I have experience of what it's like

“ We need to remove the blinkers people have about disability – because the blinkers are the real handicap.”

Richard Butchins,
producer/director

to be vulnerable. If you get that vulnerability across and allow people to understand it, then you're doing something worthwhile."

Yet he's equally keen for others to have a voice. "Of course Richard wanted to get his point across, but he wanted me to get mine across too," said Ade about the documentary they made together. "He's passionate about disability issues – I could see afterwards he was visibly moved."

Richard's wit, intellect and professionalism is a winning combination. "He's old school," said Ade, "like me! He told me stories about how he used to hang out with Ian Dury – how cool is that? Richard's one of the best."

Talent behind the camera

Who?
Rosie Jones

Occupation
Researcher

Company
Zepotron

There's something about Rosie



“Rosie is a complete original, she’s so funny, so consistently upbeat and can take on anything you care to throw at her.” Series producer Adam McLean of Objective Productions is a big fan of Rosie Jones. “There’s something about Rosie that everyone falls for.”

Rosie has cerebral palsy. “It affects my speech, mobility and manual dexterity,” she said. “My biggest problem is speaking on the phone; I’m concerned that people can understand me and I don’t want to bugger it up because that’s how I speak. But if they had a pill tomorrow

“It’s important to recognise that a disability doesn’t have to be a disadvantage; it’s simply a different point of view.”

Rosie Jones,
researcher

that would take it away I wouldn’t take it, I love it. My cerebral palsy makes me stand out.”

And stand out she certainly does. “Rosie is made for telly,” said Adam. “People in TV really love the job, and Rosie is absolutely that person. She’s becoming very much in demand.”

Her researcher skills have been well established on shows like *8 Out of 10 Cats Does Countdown* and *The Last Leg: Live from Rio*. Now she’s also branching out into stand-up comedy. “My biggest passion is comedy, especially comedy coupled with disability – it’s still something of a taboo subject, but I find it hilarious.”

Her nascent comedy career has already been noticed. “She might possibly turn to writing,” Adam reflected, “I think her stand-up suggests she’ll go to the scripted world; she could be writing sketch shows or sitcoms. Rosie has got funny bones.”

Writing is definitely an area that interests Rosie. “It’ll happen sooner rather than later,” said Adam, “she’s got a very bright future.”

Who?
Sajjad Bhatti

Occupation
Development Producer

Company
7 Wonder



The eyes have it

Sajjad Bhatti has been an insulin-dependent diabetic since he was 11 years old. His eye condition is degenerative, “Different organs start suffering in different ways – the blood vessels to my eyes have suffered over the years; ultimately they’re depriving my eyes of light.” Sajjad was registered partially blind in 2003; but this setback has done nothing to dampen his vision of what he’d like to achieve. “I want to make the world smarter,” he said simply.

Currently Sajjad is Development Producer at 7 Wonder, in charge of formulating ideas to make this mission reality. Series Producer Tim Lambert is a fan.

“We worked together on a number of projects, particularly history and science programmes at Wall to Wall Media. Sajjad was employed as a science producer, which is most unusual; he’d be setting the tone, getting us on the right line, asking the right questions. He’s utterly brilliant at it.”

Sajjad’s passion for the scientific is innate. “I was born asking questions,” he joked. Tim agreed, adding: “He cares about stuff in a way that’s quite unique.”

Perhaps Sajjad’s failing eyesight enables him to see the world differently to others. “Disability keeps me on the outside... I sort of don’t fit in any box, perhaps I’ve always been an outsider.”

But importantly Sajjad has seen a generational shift “in attitudes towards disability since Channel 4, BBC, ITV and Sky pulled their socks up, the change is remarkable. But I’ve still had to educate some people about disability along the way.”

“People don’t understand how difficult it’s been for him,” Tim observed, “maybe that’s made him the amazing person he is. Sajjad’s not currently at Wall to Wall but I’d like to pilfer him back. He’s far too important for us to lose.”

“ I’ve had to educate some people about disability along the way.

Sajjad Bhatti,
development producer

Talent behind the camera

Who?
Tom Wilde

Occupation
Producer/Director

Company
The Garden



A walk on the Wilde side

Producer/Director Tom Wilde graduated from the Channel 4 disabled researcher scheme nine years ago: “I was aware the conventional route into TV was physically demanding; you typically start as a runner and I couldn’t do that. Channel 4 circumvented that and formalised an entry into TV for me.”

Tom has since risen quickly up the ranks. Today he’s making an observational documentary set in a busy London emergency department *24 Hours in A&E*. Does his disability (he’s a double amputee) have any bearing on this current project?

“Disability interests me to a certain extent – in the wider sense it makes me more empathetic and I certainly engage with people in a robust fashion because I’m not scared,” he said. “Perhaps I have a greater insight into what patients have to go through than others.”

Executive Producer Spencer Kelly concurred, adding: “I didn’t know Tom was disabled at the start of filming; he was here to do the job. I don’t get the impression he wants to draw attention to his disability.”

This is something that Tom feels passionate about. “Disability doesn’t define me but it is certainly an inherent part of my make-up, I’d be considerably different without it. But we need to fundamentally move away from the idea that disability is a separate part of society; it should be just as ordinary and the same as everything else, be it gender or ethnicity.” Tom is the proof in the pudding.

“ Channel 4’s focus on disability gave me the support to take editorial/career risks on the high wire safe in the knowledge that I have the clout of a major broadcaster behind me.

Tom Wilde,
producer/director

Who?
Winifred Kakouris

Occupation
Researcher

Company
Raise the Roof



Invisible? Think...

“When people see me they assume that because I’m young I must be fit; I suppose my disability doesn’t match how I look.”

Winifred Kakouris suffers from fibromyalgia, a condition that affects her whole body. “I have constant chronic pain and fatigue. But people often forget about my disability, it’s invisible.”

Production manager Hannah Truswell on *Big House, Little House* remembered the first time she met Winifred. “She was quite quiet, but then I found out she has exactly the same condition as my mum; she might look fine but I could understand if she was having a flare. It made an immense change in our relationship.”

It was pot luck that Winifred had met someone who understood the nature of fibromyalgia on her very first job. “Meeting Hannah like that was important, without her I would have lost my confidence; she understood me.”

But Winifred’s confidence has blossomed; partly because of her disability. “I’ve taken it upon myself to introduce disability into the programmes that I work upon.”

“**The Year of Disability can only be a good thing! People with disabilities need to know that they can work in the industry, the door definitely is open for them.**”

Winifred Kakouris,
researcher

Her approach has been warmly welcomed. “From a professional point of view she targeted under-represented groups for *Big House, Little House*; she was a huge asset,” said Hannah.

And Winifred’s ambition to ultimately move into a production role hasn’t been missed. “She’s quite a character, incredibly determined and passionate,” noted Hannah. “As long as she has work places that understand her condition she’ll thrive; I think she’ll probably be my boss in a year or two!”

Ten things we learned this year

that we would like to share

1

Contact Access to Work if you're anxious about additional costs when hiring someone with a disability. Government funding is available for a wide range of things, from taxi fares through to specialist equipment.

www.gov.uk/access-to-work/overview

2

Be open and discuss with prospective and current employees how their disability affects them.

3

Talk to disability organisations to find out what other schemes and funding are available to help businesses employ disabled staff.

4

You are more likely to mirror the needs and concerns of disabled viewers if you employ a disabled person; one in five of the population is disabled.

5

Don't judge the book by its cover; don't make assumptions that a disabled person is unable to do the job properly.

6

Making adjustments for disability in the workplace doesn't have to cost a lot of money; many cost nothing but just entail doing things a bit differently.

7

The best person for the job could well be disabled. Don't be scared of employing a disabled person; fair practices will benefit everyone.

8

Information and resources about all things to do with recruiting and employing disabled people can be found on the ACAS website.

<http://www.acas.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=1363>

9

Be aware if your employees start to display unusual behaviour patterns. Disabilities such as mental health conditions are invisible and changes in behaviour might signify a need for support.

10

Offer disability awareness training to help staff understand and support disabled colleagues and communities. The Business Disability Forum provides such training for its members.

Thank you to all of our indie partners who have supported us on this project

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