

# Learning Difficulties & Disabilities Myth Busting Facts

## EAST SIDE CONSORTIUM

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“People with learning difficulties/disabilities are unable to learn”	2	<b>What is this myth-busting pack about?</b>
“are too lazy to learn”	2	Every day people are targeted or picked on because they are seen as “different” in some way – it may be because of their race, their colour, their religion, their gender, their disability or their sexuality.
“are not able to work for a living”	3	Groups that are often the target of abuse or discrimination include people with learning difficulties and disabilities.
“Learning difficulties/disabilities only affect children”	3	This pack aims to dispel some of the myths about people with learning difficulties and disabilities, provide you with the facts and hopefully increase understanding. It is part of a series of myth-busting packs produced by the East Side Consortium.
“People with learning difficulties/disabilities are not able to make decisions about their own lives”	4	Other myth-busting packs currently available from the East Side Consortium include:
“cannot lead independent lives”	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• New Arrivals</li><li>• Islamaphobia</li><li>• Homophobia</li></ul>
“cannot have adult relationships”	5	
“What is meant by learning difficulty and learning disability?”	6	<b>Barking &amp; Dagenham Racial Equality Council (BARDAG), Redbridge Equalities &amp; Community Council (RECC) and Waltham Forest Race Equality Council (WFREC) came together to form the East Side Consortium</b> so that they could work together on projects across the three boroughs.

**Over 1.5 million people in the UK have a learning disability.**

**At least half of all adults with a learning disability live in the family home.**

**People with a learning disability are 58 times more likely to die aged under 50 than other people.**

**MYTH:** “People with learning difficulties and disabilities are unable to learn”

**THE FACTS:** Learning difficulties and disabilities can cover a wide spectrum of individuals and abilities. Some people with learning difficulties have above average intelligence. Others may have an impaired ability to learn or may develop more slowly than average. Once their learning difficulty has been diagnosed many people are able to learn successfully with the right kind of help and go on to be high achievers. Some will need support for the rest of their lives.

**Albert Einstein** *did not learn to speak until he was three. He also had dyslexia and was considered backward because he had trouble with language until he went to a school that taught him using practical methods.*



**MYTH:** “People with learning difficulties/disabilities are too lazy to learn”

**THE FACTS:** Learning difficulties and disabilities can affect a person’s ability to learn or absorb and process information in the same way that most people do. Most, but not all, learning disabilities can be overcome with the right sort of teaching and help but in a few, severe cases, progress may be very limited or slow. This is nothing to do with laziness. Many people with learning disabilities can make good progress with help but some people will always need help to do even the most basic things.

**8 out of 10 children with a learning disability are bullied.**

**4 times as many people with a learning disability die of preventable causes as people in the general population.**

**75% of GPs have received no training to help them treat people with a learning disability**

**Michael Phelps** has set many records in two Olympic Games. He suffers from ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder) and as a child, was unable to focus and concentrate the way his classmates could.



**MYTH:** “People with learning difficulties and disabilities are not able to work for a living”

**THE FACTS:** 7% of people with a learning disability have a job. At least 65% of people with a learning disability want to work. Many people with learning difficulties have highly successful careers. Just because someone has a learning disability it does not necessarily mean they do not want to work or would not be able to work. In fact many people would like to work and have the ability to do so, but face prejudice and discrimination in the workplace.



**Cher:** Cher was born Cherilyn Sarkisian in El Centro, USA, in 1946. She dropped out of high school when she was 16 because of a serious struggle with dyslexia, although at the time she and her teachers didn't understand her disability.

**MYTH:** “Learning difficulties only affect children”

**THE FACTS:** Things can sometimes become even more difficult for people with learning difficulties as they grow up and life becomes more complicated. There are many adults that were never diagnosed properly with learning disabilities as a child and are not diagnosed until they reach adulthood.

**58,000 people with a learning disability are supported by day care services.**

**29,000 adults with a learning disability live with parents aged 70 or over.**

**Whoopi Goldberg** is not only a famous entertainer who has earned many awards, she is also an author and UN Goodwill Ambassador. At school, because of her dyslexia, her teachers thought she was “slow” or “backward”.



**MYTH:** “People with learning difficulties are not able to make decisions about their own lives.”

**THE FACTS:** This depends very much on the severity and nature of the learning difficulty, but most people with a learning difficulty are as capable as anyone else of making their own decisions about their lives. For some people, however, help may be needed in some instances and in the most severe cases people need to have someone to care for them and make decisions for them. However, people with learning difficulties have the same right as anyone else to express themselves, to make their own decisions about their lives and to have their views and interests taken into account in those situations where they are unable to make the decision for themselves.

**Jamie Oliver**, the famous chef and T.V. personality is one of many famous and successful people with ADHD.



**In a study nearly 9 out of 10 people with learning disabilities had been harassed or attacked within the previous year, with 32% saying they experienced harassment or attacks on a daily or weekly basis. 23% had been assaulted.**

(Research by Mencap *Living in Fear, 2000*)

**In the 2 years up to the end of March 2009, 576 people were prosecuted for disability hate crimes with 76% of the completed cases resulting in a conviction.**

**MYTH:** “People with learning difficulties and disabilities cannot lead independent lives”

**THE FACTS:** Whilst there are some people with severe learning disability who will always need support with even the most basic of their daily needs, many more people with learning disability /difficulties can and do lead fully independent lives. Others may be mainly independent but still need help or advice with some aspects of daily life. The most important thing is for people to be as independent as possible whilst ensuring that provision is there to offer help and support when it is needed.

**Temple Grandin** has a high-functioning form



*of Autism. She did not learn to speak until the age of 4, but excelled at school thanks to supportive parents and good teachers and she eventually became Professor of Animal*

*Science at Colorado State University after completing a doctorate in Animal Science.*

**MYTH:** “People with learning difficulties and disabilities cannot have adult relationships”

**THE FACTS:** There is a lot of prejudice and misunderstanding around this issue and sometimes the natural desire of families to protect their vulnerable relatives from exploitation or abuse may lead to unnecessary restrictions or barriers preventing people with learning disabilities from forming adult relationships. However, it is important for people to form independent friendships and relationships when they are able to do so. Isolation can be the problem that prevents people who are not working from having a social life and some people with learning difficulties may find their difficulties hold them back from meeting or interacting with other people, but often this is a matter of confidence and can be overcome with help and understanding.

## **East Side Consortium**

Members of the East Side Consortium are:

### **Barking & Dagenham Racial Equality Council**

Tel: 02085942773

Unit 2, 30 Thames Rd;  
Barking IG11 0HZ

Mon – Fri 11am – 4pm  
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### **Redbridge Equalities & Community Council**

Tel: 02085518178

Gants Hill United Reformed Church  
39 Woodford Ave;  
Gants Hill,  
Ilford IG2 6UH

Mon-Fri 11am – 3 pm  
\*\*\*\*\*

### **Waltham Forest Race Equality Council**

Tel: 02082792425

Community Place  
806 High Road  
Leyton,  
London E10 6AE

Mon, Wed and Thur  
10 am – 3pm

## **“What is meant by learning difficulty and learning disability?”**

There is no standard definition but the terms “Learning Difficulties” and “Learning Disability” can cover a wide range of conditions which may be triggered by:

- Problems in the development of the brain
- Accident
- Illness
- An inherited gene e.g. Down’s Syndrome
- Problems in early childhood

Dyslexia, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, and Dyspraxia are usually categorised as “Learning Difficulties” and they can affect people’s lives by making it more difficult for them to learn in the same way as most people. However, with the right kind of help most people can overcome these difficulties and lead a fulfilling life.

“Learning Disabilities” may have a much more profound and long-lasting effect and in some cases may mean that a person requires help with even the most basic of day to day living requirements. However the level of help required and the level of developmental progress that can be made varies from individual to individual.

It is a shameful indictment of our society that people with learning difficulties and learning disabilities face prejudice and discrimination and are at increased risk of being targeted as the victims of hate crime.