**Transcript: YDRF Disability Hate Podcast Episode 2**

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**SPEAKERS**

Jennie, Olivia

**Olivia**

[0:03]

Hi, I'm Olivia and I am a volunteer with York Disability Rights Forum. Today I will be talking to Jennie Cox who is a local area coordinator on their experiences of disability hate to raise awareness of lived experience of disabled people. So, the first question is, the definition of a hate crime by the CPS is described as any incident, slash, crime, which is perceived by the victim or any other person to be motivated by a hostility or prejudiced based on a person’s disability or perceived disability. How do you feel about this definition?

**Jennie**

[0:39]

Well, it's, it's quite a broad definition, isn't it? Yeah, I, I guess there's reasons for that, though. You know, it's, on the one hand, it's really good because it encompasses all those kinds of subtle acts of hate, doesn't it? All of your kind of covert hate crimes, as well as the more obvious overt crimes.

But I can see how it could be a bit contentious to people that are perpetrating hate, or they could challenge it as well. It leaves it open to quite a lot of challenge, because you're involved in people's perceptions, aren't you? And how do you prove that a perception is right? How do you prove what's motivating somebody's actions? It's, it's so hard, isn't it? And I think the burden of proof with these kinds of hate crimes is so high on the victims.

**Olivia**

[1:38]

Yeah, definitely. I think also, for me with the definition, it's just it's, it's very wordy.

**Jennie**

[1:44]

Yeah, it’s a long one.

**Olivia**

[1:45]

Yeah, people may have a difficulty of understanding actually what it means because I have to read it a few times to get it in my head.

**Jennie**

[1:55]

Yeah, yeah. I guess with these definitely, you know, they, they've obviously tried to make it very broad. So it encompasses a lot of things and covers a lot of things. But yeah, it's it is wordy. It's not a kind of easy, straightforward thing to understand. I'm not sure it is an easy and straightforward issue to understand either, though, is it? There's a lot of grey areas there. Yeah.

**Olivia**

[2:24]

Definitely. I think we can move on to the next one is, do you think the pandemic has made any differences in disability hate crime, or in the way disabled people are seen?

**Jennie**

[2:35]

Yeah, yeah. I think during the lockdowns, there was a very, very sort of real sense of people with disabilities becoming a bit more invisible, you know, people that were quite isolated, that could have been quite isolated living on their own anyway, and particularly people with mental health issues. And, I think the pandemic is, it feels like it certainly widened a lot of those health inequalities that already existed in society. It feels like they've just, you know, the gap has just become massive. And it's got a lot wider. And I do. Yeah, I think that was a big concern for my team, sort of early on in the pandemic, during the lockdowns was trying to make sure that people weren't forgotten. People weren't kind of lost or forgotten about.

And then as we've kind of moved through the pandemic, into this, living with COVID strategy, I think the worries kind of shifted that, you know, we were kind of moving back into normality. And in, in some ways, that's great, you know, everything's opening up again, people are getting out and doing things that they couldn't do before seeing family and friends. But then there's still the worry that, and we're seeing that a lot of people are getting left behind with that, as well, because people are still very worried, very frightened. People with long term health conditions, which often go alongside a lot of disabilities, they're really worried about the health. This disease is still a big threat to them.

So, yeah, there's a real palpable sense that people are getting left behind, you know, and all this excitement we’re swept up in that way, you know, returning to normal - I think, again, it's kind of widen those inequalities, again, because we've got groups of people that are really being excluded.

**Olivia**

[4:49]

Yeah, do you think people sort of opinions towards mental health changed a little bit as well? Because I thought people were like, people that have never struggled with that anxiety was starting to struggle with it. I think that became a little bit more, in my opinion, sympathetic. I don't know if that's something that you noticed?

**Jennie**

[5:06]

Yeah, I think there's certainly been, there's been a huge rise in the amount of people we're seeing that’re struggling with their mental health, I think and particularly anxiety. So, I think maybe one positive is that it has kind of raised awareness of some of those issues around social isolation and the impact on mental health. And it's brought some of those issues really to the surface and awareness of people who may not have even thought about, you know, being isolated or lonely before, because I think all of us in some sense, were quite isolated and lonely during lockdown.

So, I guess that's one positive and, and the cost-of-living crisis that sort of followed on from the pandemic and sort of linked to it - It's raised, again, it's raised a lot of awareness around welfare benefits. There's a lot more people who have been kind of forced into needing to claim welfare benefits. So, I hope that - the optimist in me hopes that that means that people, some of the attitudes have shifted, you know, some of the quite stigmatized attitudes around welfare benefits and claimants. So, yeah, I think there's, yeah, God, there's a whole lot of impacts, isn't there?

**Olivia**

[6:40]

Yeah, but I think like you've been pointing out, there are obviously a lot of negatives, but there are some positives out of like, the treatment towards people after the pandemic, really, I think, moving on to the next one, is, what are the impacts of disability hate? It's quite a broad, broad thing to talk about.

**Jennie**

[6:57]

Yeah, again, there's, there's so many isn't there, it's huge. But I think, you know, at the worst, just the impact can be devastating content. And, and, and I think that's thinking about it sort of on an individual level, but also on a kind of societal level, you know, the kind of culture that develops around in some communities and some areas and workplaces and institutions. It can, yeah, it can just be devastating the impact it has on people's lives. And, and really long lasting as well.

And, you know, I think, I think sometimes when it becomes embedded in a culture, people - and goes back to what I was saying about that, you know, there's that very subtle, there's often there's very subtle forms of hate that, that kind of covert hate that people maybe don't always realize, it's quite passive, they don't realize what they're doing constitutes disability hate. And in some ways, that type of hate is, is more dangerous, isn't it? Because it's less seen, it's a little bit more acceptable, and it becomes accepted and adopted as a culture and way of being of whole groups. And then it becomes harder to challenge. But, yeah, I think, it sort of goes hand in hand with labelling people, and stigmatization, and some of those things that just become taken for granted in terms of the language we use, which can be really, really harmful.

And, you know, I'm particularly aware of that as well as a professional working in health and social care sector. And I think the power imbalances that that can create with the people that we're working with, and we’re introduced to, and some of the practices you know, that we get drawn into the common sort of duty of care which include, you know, keeping records, and for example, keeping records about people, having meetings, and talking about people in this language and writing it down. It can have huge a impact. One of the mental health diagnoses I've really got in mind is personality disorder. And some of the language that goes alongside that diagnosis. So, people are often labelled as challenging, as being challenging and difficult and manipulative and playing people off each other.

And all of that, to me is, you know - I think if we go back to that really broad definition - I would argue that professionals sitting in a room and talking about somebody in that terminology and writing that on their records that will stay with them, potentially forever - that could, that could constitute disability hate.

**Olivia**

[10:34]

Yeah, that's a really interesting sort of take on it. And something that I've never really thought of, but I think, like you said, being labelled is such a powerful thing. And if a person saw a document about themselves, and they're like, “Oh, well, I only fit this mold.” And it can be quite damaging, like you said, that people can do that.

**Jennie**

[10:54]

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. I think so. Yeah, definitely. And then there's, you know, the more overt kinds of disability hate. I think it's easier for a lot of us to agree that that's wrong, you know, if you see somebody being physically attacked, or verbally abused because of a disability. But again, you know, that’s just as damaging, isn't it, but in a different way?

**Olivia**

[11:30]

Yeah, I feel like a lot of people think that’s bullying, rather than hate. As like the definition, I don't think people would often think of disability and hate crime together. When I've had conversations, people are like “Oh, I didn't know that was a hate crime.” And I think people just think it’s bullying and don't see it as a severe thing. So, I think that's why we're doing these podcasts to sort of bring light to it and be like, this isn't acceptable.

**Jennie**

[12:00]

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, I think that's really valid. And I think too much comes under that umbrella term of bullying, doesn't it? And it's, it's, it's a good way of minimizing things. Using the word bullying. It sort of takes you back to school, doesn’t it?

**Olivia**

[12:23]

[laughs] Yeah.

So, I think moving on to the last one. If you would like to share, can you tell us about a situation where disability hate was dealt with well? So this can be in general, or it can also be a personal experience.

**Jennie**

[12:40]

Yeah, well, I've got, I've got an example of a situation where I've experienced disability hate, and it didn't necessarily go well. At the time, it really, it really has quite a big impact on me. But I think what has, what has been a positive from it and what has gone well, is that it's really given me a drive and a passion around trying to make things different and make things better for people with disabilities, and particularly around mental health, because that's what my example relates to.

So, the sort of labeling and stigmatization that we were talking about, that's something I’ve felt in relation to my mental health in the workplace for quite a long time. So, I have a formal diagnosis of bipolar, which is one of the diagnoses that's up there with, you know, the most severe, the most severe diagnoses you can get. And with that, similar to personality disorder, there's a lot of assumptions, there's a lot of labels that that go alongside that. And I think sort of in general, in the workplace, in a lot of workplaces, there's quite a negative culture around mental health. So, for a long time, I think I felt a real pressure to kind of hide that diagnosis; not be open about it. Because you see a lot of that covert sort of discrimination or covert hate that I described, where people sort of make comments and maybe they don't know what they're saying is really hurtful. But it does drive you to sort of hide that and keep it to yourself.

But the incident that I had in mind to share was a time actually I was brave enough to be really open about my mental health and my diagnosis and share that. And I actually worked in the mental health sector, which sort of made me think that it was a good place to be open and share it and the attitudes would be really supportive. Unfortunately, they weren't. So, I have to be, I feel like I'm being a little bit vague, I've got to be quite careful what I say about it, because it is something that I went on to challenge. So, I've actually signed an NDA. [laughs] So, I can’t - I challenged it and challenged it successfully, so I can't go into lots of detail, but what I can describe is sort of how it made me feel.

**Olivia**

[15:40]

Yeah.

**Jennie**

[15:41]

And so, after I shared this information with my manager at the time, I was just treated completely differently at work. I went from being treated as somebody who was really capable, really organized, and able to take lots of things on; complicated tasks, be given a lot of trust, to being treated as somebody who was quite weak and quite fragile, and maybe couldn't be trusted to take on too much responsibility. So, they’d started to change my job role. And the impact of all of that just, it really, really sort of undermined my confidence, made me some question my ability. And also as well, I think, what went with that was being treated like I was somehow less intelligent as well. You know, like, it was a weakness of the mind, so I was, you know, talked to differently. It was, yeah, it was a, it was a horrible experience, and I think it did change the way I saw myself for a while, until, I got to a point where I thought no, this, you know, this isn't right, and I'm going to challenge it. And, and like I said, it was a successful challenge and that has really driven me to encourage other people to do the same - you know, you shouldn't just accept that. You should challenge it where you can.

And I love the role I'm in now because, you know, we've got that active advocacy role to encourage people to see their strengths and challenge anything, any kind of behaviour like that. And like I said, it's left me with this real passion for people's rights around mental health. And, you know, that's driven from a place of real lived experience, you know, I've really lived and breathed that, and survived it, I guess. So, yeah.

**Olivia**

[18:34]

I think it’s amazing to hear that you could take something like that and turn it into, like fire and passion to make change. And I think with, with some of the other people I've spoken to in the podcasts, like a similar sort of, they've had a bad experience, and they’ve used that in a way to fuel them to make change. And I think that's a really nice way to finish this podcast. I think it's just amazing to see people making change. So, I just want to say a huge thank you to you for talking to me and sharing your thoughts and your own personal experiences. I really appreciate it.

**Jennie**

[19:08]

Oh, you're very welcome. Thank you for listening.

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