

# Including children, young people and adults with additional needs in Church

Additional Needs Alliance

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01:00:05,000 --> 01:00:11,679

We are together the Additional Needs Alliance, but we're not an organisation.

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We are a movement, but we have many organisations working alongside us which is a privilege.

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01:00:19,960 --> 01:00:29,599

We have many families working with us. We have many disabled people with us, many volunteers and many professionals,

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so we're quite a mix of people. We formed over eight years ago, a personal passion of mine, but also a passion of Mark

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01:00:39,840 --> 01:00:47,559

when we were introduced and then the Additional Needs happened. And it's been a lovely journey.

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01:00:47,559 --> 01:00:53,239

I myself was a children's nurse working with children with disabilities and additional needs,

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01:00:53,239 --> 01:00:57,320

specialising in the weird syndromes which I loved immensely.

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I am now disabled myself. I am a partially-sighted wheelchair user. How about that for a combination!

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And I still love to work alongside all of those with additional needs and disabilities.

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And we have a website [theadditionalneedsalliance.org.uk](http://theadditionalneedsalliance.org.uk) which contains lots and lots of useful information

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and lots of links to organisations that are involved with the Additional Needs Alliance,

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but most of our work is done on the Facebook group, the Additional Needs Alliance.

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If you're not a member, please do join, but do remember to answer the questions to get in, else you won't get in.

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We have 2600 members on there. There's never a dull moment within that group. There's always something happening.

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We have some aims, always good. We want to encourage conversations about children and young people

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who have additional needs & disabilities. We want to resource the church to make inclusion & belonging a reality.

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01:02:19,760 --> 01:02:29,599

We want to strengthen resilient faith regardless of ability, and we want to create a passion for action and change

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and that doesn't need any more explanation. We had a lovely comment from one of our members the other day.

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As a new person joined, they put underneath, 'This is such an understanding, well managed and useful group.

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01:02:45,400 --> 01:02:51,320

'the admin are all very approachable and experienced.' Well wasn't that wonderful,

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01:02:51,320 --> 01:02:59,119

but that is the whole group working together. Over to you, Mark.

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01:02:59,119 --> 01:03:07,320

Thanks Kay, and if we can have the next slide up please, in true Chris Whitty style,

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01:03:07,320 --> 01:03:14,480

It's my privilege to be able to share with us this morning

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01:03:14,480 --> 01:03:23,039

for supporting children, young people, and indeed young adults with additional needs in our churches

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and I guess the summary of what I'm going to share with us in the next few moments is about communication

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01:03:30,760 --> 01:03:38,159

and about relationship. It's about talking with people and hearing from people and building relationships with people

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01:03:38,159 --> 01:03:47,519

and using what we have learned together to help their children, young people and their families,

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01:03:47,519 --> 01:03:55,079

and to be able to put in place things that are going to make a real difference for them in our churches.

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So the first one is to talk with the young people and families themselves, to learn from them,

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from their experience in life generally. Perhaps when we see  
a child or young person in church,

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01:04:09,760 --> 01:04:19,559

it represents a small percentage of their overall life, but  
there will be things that they do at home or at school

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that we could borrow from and use in our own setting. I'll  
share a resource

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01:04:24,920 --> 01:04:28,079

that can help us to do that in just a moment.

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01:04:28,079 --> 01:04:36,800

Talk with adults, perhaps in your church community that may  
have the same disabilities, differences or diversity

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01:04:36,800 --> 01:04:42,719

to the children and young people that you're journeying  
with. Learn from their experience.

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01:04:42,719 --> 01:04:48,639

Listen to their thoughts on how to make church better for  
everyone.

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What are the barriers that they have or still experience that together you can work on to remove and reduce?

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01:04:58,119 --> 01:05:06,840

Connect with people who get it and are successful in supporting all children and young people.

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01:05:06,840 --> 01:05:13,280

That might be a folk in a church near you. It's great when churches partner together and work together

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01:05:13,280 --> 01:05:20,000

to understand and put in place strategies that are going to support and include everybody,

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But it could be through groups like the Additional Needs Alliance or other groups that are out there

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in the internet that link people together and share ideas, resources and allow us to all journey and learn together.

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And of course, all of this can mean change and culture change.

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01:05:40,880 --> 01:05:46,280

There's two very dangerous C words right next to each other.  
Culture change may be necessary

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01:05:46,280 --> 01:05:51,440

It's really important that as we hear all of the views that we've been thinking about,

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that we understand that often it's us that need to be the ones that change and adapt.

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We shouldn't expect children and young people with additional needs and their families

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01:06:03,400 --> 01:06:13,559

to be the ones that adapt to meet what we do at church.  
We're the ones that put those changes in place.

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A tool to help us to link with children and young people and their families better, to understand them better

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is to use a resource like a one-page profile. These are great. You can download these for free

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from the Sheff Kids website,

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and I'll pop the Sheff Kids website in the chat in a few moments as well so that you can access it there.

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01:06:37,239 --> 01:06:43,760

I'm sorry the pictures on the screen are a bit small, but I'll try and put a couple of examples

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of the one page profiles in the chat as well so that you can access them from there too.

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But broadly, they ask three key things. What do people like and admire about me is the first one,

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the biggest box changes the narrative - so often children with additional needs are views as a problem to solve,

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01:07:03,480 --> 01:07:11,519

and lots of negativity that can follow them. But by asking that question of what do people like and admire about you?

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01:07:11,519 --> 01:07:16,840

that changes the narrative, and that's such an important thing to do. What makes me happy?

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It's a great place to think about as well. What are things that children and young people with additional needs enjoy?

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01:07:25,360 --> 01:07:31,760

What do they like doing? Maybe we can use some of that to connect with them in a church context.

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And then how I want to be supported. It's hearing from them.

It's person centric, listening to their voice,

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01:07:38,519 --> 01:07:45,400

allowing them to teach us about how to put things in place  
to support them. So I'll share some of these resources

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01:07:45,400 --> 01:07:50,679

in just a moment and you'll be able to get those, hopefully  
from the chat. Next slide, please.

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Here's a comment from a somebody who was trying to get some

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info about how to support young people in their context,

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they joined the Additional Needs Alliance

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and found the answers that they were looking for.

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01:08:21,960 --> 01:08:27,399

Well, it's great encouragement for us, but also, perhaps it gives you a little insight

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01:08:27,399 --> 01:08:31,680

into some of the things that we do in the Additional Needs Alliance. So do come and join us.

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01:08:31,680 --> 01:08:40,119

And there's loads there that you can see next slide, please. One of the things that we offer, and again,

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there's some small print here. I apologise for that. I'll add a link to this information as well

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01:08:46,279 --> 01:08:53,760

so you can access it a bit better. In the website there is a map and directory of accessible churches.

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Churches that identify as putting things in place that can make a difference for children and young people

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01:09:01,600 --> 01:09:06,199

with additional needs and their families. We've got nearly 70 of them across the country at the moment.

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We could do with more, especially in Scotland, Northern Ireland and North Wales, but across the UK

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01:09:14,880 --> 01:09:20,520

we've got a map and directory there of churches that get it. Maybe there's one near you.

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01:09:20,520 --> 01:09:27,039

Maybe there's one that you could link to and see if together you could develop some strategies

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01:09:27,039 --> 01:09:30,880

that would be helpful for the children and young people you're journeying with,

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01:09:30,880 --> 01:09:39,680

remembering to include them in that conversation. Now back to Kay for a final thought to start to wrap up.

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01:09:42,800 --> 01:09:50,159

Final thoughts on the suggestions for you. Don't put limits on what a child or young person

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01:09:50,159 --> 01:09:55,600

with additional needs can achieve, and I'm talking both practically and spiritually on that,

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01:09:55,600 --> 01:10:03,279

but especially in relation to their faith. God can and does work in the lives of everyone,

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01:10:03,279 --> 01:10:12,479

whatever disabilities, diversity or differences that they may or may not have, God doesn't discriminate or exclude.

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01:10:12,479 --> 01:10:19,600

And I wish I had time to tell you some wonderful stories of the impact of God and the Holy Spirit

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01:10:19,600 --> 01:10:27,439

have had on so many children that I've been sitting alongside. The question we're left with is this.

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01:10:27,439 --> 01:10:32,840

Are we being useful to God in helping to reach them, or are we getting in the way?

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01:10:32,840 --> 01:10:39,720

Getting in the way of the Holy Spirit's work. Back over to Mark.

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01:10:43,479 --> 01:10:46,359

This is our final slide before questions really,

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just to give some contact information for us

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so that if we can be of any help to you as you continue on

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01:10:54,319 --> 01:10:57,920

this journey, here's how you can find us.

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01:10:57,920 --> 01:10:59,560

Our email addresses are there,

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01:10:59,560 --> 01:11:02,319

but also a reminder again of the website

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and also of the Facebook group

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and it would be great to journey with you.

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01:11:06,560 --> 01:11:10,439

Thanks ever so much for following our talk this morning.

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01:11:13,880 --> 01:11:21,600

Fabulous, thank you so much. A reminder to folk that the chat box is definitely now open and any questions

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01:11:21,600 --> 01:11:27,079

that you might have specifically for Kay and for Mark, it'll be great to see them popping up,

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01:11:27,079 --> 01:11:34,920

One that has been circulating for a while behind the scenes and this one, well, I think I'll go to Mark first,

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01:11:34,920 --> 01:11:41,119

is Mark, you have a son with additional needs. How is it as a parent?

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trying to, convince might be the wrong word, but trying to show churches that

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01:11:48,840 --> 01:11:53,000

your son is fearfully and wonderfully made and not a problem to be solved?

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01:11:53,000 --> 01:11:58,079

Have you got any anecdotes, quick anecdotes or tips for churches from a parent's point of view?

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01:11:58,079 --> 01:12:07,319

Yeah, lots. Lots of stories. We could fill a day just with stories about, yeah, good, bad and indifferent experiences,

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01:12:07,319 --> 01:12:15,199

that we've had as family but also that many of the families that journey with us in the Additional Needs Alliance have.

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01:12:15,199 --> 01:12:23,199

Yeah, tips I think, you know it's part of that culture change, really. It's part of helping churches

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01:12:23,199 --> 01:12:30,039

to go on that journey of a little bit, like when I was talking about the one page profiles just now

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01:12:30,039 --> 01:12:34,439

changing the narrative from here's a problem to solve,

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01:12:34,439 --> 01:12:38,880

they know we're going to have somebody with challenging behaviour, or it's going to be difficult,

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01:12:38,880 --> 01:12:44,479

or we don't know what to do. Changing that narrative to one of, you know,

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01:12:44,479 --> 01:12:53,479

here's another member of our church. Unity, let's together journey and work out ways of including

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01:12:53,479 --> 01:13:00,279

supporting this loved member of our community and not viewing my son James or any other child or young person

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01:13:00,279 --> 01:13:07,880

as being different in negative ways, but actually thinking positively about how we can include everyone

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01:13:07,880 --> 01:13:18,439

and learning from the master himself. We only need to look at many of Jesus' encounters with disabled people

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01:13:18,439 --> 01:13:25,720

to see how to do this well, time and time again, he taught us in his encounters with disabled people

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01:13:25,720 --> 01:13:34,920

how to do this positively, how to treat people with you know equality and respect and dignity.

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01:13:34,920 --> 01:13:40,399

So yeah, there's plenty of examples there that we can share with churches too.

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01:13:40,399 --> 01:13:46,960

A question maybe for Kay then, is why did the Additional Needs Alliance decide to focus on the younger age group

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rather than going across the whole age spectrum? Why children and young people from your point of view?

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Well, at the time there was actually more organisations working with adults with disabilities and additional needs

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01:14:02,520 --> 01:14:08,840

than there were with children and young people. That has actually levelled up.

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01:14:08,840 --> 01:14:14,640

There are lots and lots of organisations that now work with either young people and children

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01:14:14,640 --> 01:14:23,439

because that is one skill set, or work with adults. Myself personally, I work across every single age group going.

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01:14:23,439 --> 01:14:31,399

It's just that my working life experience is very specialised in children. And I could see that children

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01:14:31,399 --> 01:14:35,840

were getting and still are being turned away from church on a regular basis.

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01:14:35,840 --> 01:14:44,199

And perhaps if I can chip in with an extra comment there from me as well, agreeing with what Kay said,

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01:14:44,199 --> 01:14:50,319

and when we found each other, you know there was a gap that needed to be filled here

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01:14:50,319 --> 01:14:54,720

I work for Urban Saints and we're a children and youth organisation and I've been a youth worker

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01:14:54,720 --> 01:15:01,840

and children's worker for over 30 years. So that's the area that is a real focus for me too

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01:15:01,840 --> 01:15:08,279

and so together with Kay we saw this gap and thought hey, we need to do something about this

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01:15:08,279 --> 01:15:12,479

and are delighted that others have joined in over the subsequent years too.

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01:15:12,479 --> 01:15:20,880

Absolutely. It's interesting to look at the world outside church. I'm loath to say secular because God's everywhere,

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01:15:20,880 --> 01:15:28,640

and to see that actually medically there's huge support. Not always effective, but huge support

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01:15:28,640 --> 01:15:36,279

for children and young people medically when they're disabled, but actually that all stops when you hit 16 or 18,

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01:15:36,279 --> 01:15:44,119

depending on the local authority and I know as an adult there's no support for me and my cerebral palsy.

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01:15:44,119 --> 01:15:52,920

I just manage myself, quite badly, so it is great that  
actually church wants to do all ages.

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01:15:52,920 --> 01:15:59,159

But none of us are expert across the whole spectrum, so to  
have that specialism is really important,

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01:15:59,159 --> 01:16:06,680

There is a question of course about one disabled child is  
not the same as the next disabled child.

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01:16:06,680 --> 01:16:11,359

If you want to meet a disabled child, you need to meet  
pretty much half the children in the world

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01:16:11,359 --> 01:16:18,279

to know what disability looks like. So how about when there  
are sort of conflicting needs within the disabilities?

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01:16:18,279 --> 01:16:22,720

How about that? Who wants to go first on that one?

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01:16:22,720 --> 01:16:32,520

Well, I'll chip in with a with a real life experience of

this. I'll try and make this as quick as possible.

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01:16:32,520 --> 01:16:38,399

There was a church that got in touch to say they had two people that they were trying to support,

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01:16:38,399 --> 01:16:50,319

one who needed to have their assistance dog with them in church. The other who was dangerously allergic to dog fur.

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01:16:50,319 --> 01:16:56,079

And so together we worked out a way of both people being in church at the same time.

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01:16:56,079 --> 01:17:04,680

Both able to engage with what was going on both in the main sort of worship area, but in different parts of it

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01:17:04,680 --> 01:17:11,680

and with measures in place to make sure that that worked successfully and it did and still does.

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01:17:11,680 --> 01:17:19,640

But yeah, it took just a lot of thinking and a lot of



talking, and a lot of planning and working through stuff.

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01:17:19,640 --> 01:17:27,039

And sometimes that's what's needed. And actually it's about not giving up, but continuing to look for options

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01:17:27,039 --> 01:17:30,039

and ways to make this work.

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01:17:30,039 --> 01:17:33,239

That goes back to your first slide, doesn't it? Which is conversation.

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01:17:33,239 --> 01:17:38,439

The only way we find out what someone's needs are and where they might be in conflict with somebody else's

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01:17:38,439 --> 01:17:42,239

is saying right, what can we do? What can we do about it together?

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01:17:42,239 --> 01:17:48,880

And agency, giving the disabled person & their family permission to say this is what works, this is what doesn't

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01:17:48,880 --> 01:17:54,960

rather than saviour coming in, swooping in with a stevia thing and saying I'll do it for you.

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01:17:54,960 --> 01:18:01,439

Yeah it was about learning from both of those people and building relationship with them

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01:18:01,439 --> 01:18:07,399

but also helping them to build relationship with each other so that they both understood

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01:18:07,399 --> 01:18:14,520

what the other person needed to have in place. And by building that sort of cross relationship

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01:18:14,520 --> 01:18:17,520

we were then able to find a way forward.

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01:18:17,520 --> 01:18:23,880

Kay, I've got a final question for you, which if you want to defer this and say I'll think about it and get back to you,

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01:18:23,880 --> 01:18:32,079

then you're quite allowed to. You went from being someone who was able bodied, or non disabled sorry,

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01:18:32,079 --> 01:18:40,800

to someone who has a little bingo card of disabilities. How has it been, transferring from one identity to another,

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01:18:40,800 --> 01:18:43,800

and what do you think you've gained from becoming disabled?

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01:18:44,600 --> 01:18:53,479

I've gained more than I've lost, because my whole working life was based around

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01:18:53,479 --> 01:18:59,520

actually coming to the point I'm at now. So at 14 I was working alongside children with disabilities.

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01:18:59,520 --> 01:19:08,960

And actually coping with my own disability was helped by those people that I thought I was going to help.

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01:19:08,960 --> 01:19:15,920

I'm still in contact with those kids and they make me feel incredibly old 'cause they're in their 30s and 40s now.

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01:19:15,920 --> 01:19:22,640

But they are the ones that are providing an awful lot of support for me, and it's always been that mutual thing

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01:19:22,640 --> 01:19:27,760

from me being 14 and now being an awful lot older and disabled.

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01:19:29,079 --> 01:19:34,720

Thank you, that's a big question to jump on you with, but I thought it was very important to hear

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01:19:34,720 --> 01:19:39,760

that lived experience. Friends, thank you to Kay and to Mark for being here.

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01:19:39,760 --> 01:19:45,000

It's a brief snippet into what they do, so please get in touch with them either through personal message

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01:19:45,000 --> 01:19:50,079

in the chat box or the details of their website is further  
up the chat,

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01:19:50,079 --> 01:19:54,159

which means you can get hold of them in a variety of  
different social media ways.