



# 1. Understanding Inclusive Education

## 1.2 The need for inclusive education

## Introduction

This section outlines why Back Up have produced this toolkit, by highlighting the research which evidences the need for inclusive education.



**Back Up schools and families inclusion service provides education and support to the school in understanding the needs, and perhaps more importantly what is not needed, for children with a spinal cord injury. In my experience, schools often are unaware and can struggle to make activities inclusive to all.**

Cheryl Ali, Occupational Therapist, Spinal Cord Injury Centre at the Royal National Orthopaedic Hospital, Stanmore.

Back Up's vision is a world where people affected by spinal cord injury can realise their full potential. As the only charity in the UK that runs dedicated services for young people and children affected by spinal cord injury we believe that children have the right to a fulfilling and active life. We inspire people affected by spinal cord injury to transform their lives.



**The key question is 'How are we going to do it?' – Not 'can we do it?'**

Head Teacher, primary school

We knew from listening to children and young people and their families that there was a need to support mainstream schools in welcoming and supporting a spinal cord injured child or young person in to their class rooms and that we were best place to meet that need. Spinal cord injury in under 18's is relatively rare, but the complexity of managing medical, social and emotional needs can be daunting. When done well the impact on the child and their family is lifelong and the rewards for the young person, their family, the school and the state are immeasurable. Many contributors of this toolkit have thrived through the good practice illustrated here and have gone on to be solicitors, communications experts and Paralympic athletes.

Our values run through this toolkit and are illustrated in the stories and quotes that bring our advice and experience alive.

- Driven by the needs of people with spinal cord injury, we are **passionate** about transforming lives.
- Through **challenge** and **fun** we open up possibilities to develop, achieve and get the most out of life.
- We **respect** individuality and embrace diversity.
- We strive for quality and **excellence** in all we do.

## The need

Spinal cord injury is permanent. It can happen to anyone through accident or illness and is as easy as falling down the stairs.

Back Up understands that a spinal cord injury can be devastating, but we believe it should not prevent anyone from getting the most out of life.

Children with spinal cord injury are more likely to be unemployed and experience lower community participation when they reach adulthood. They are also less likely to live independently or get married.

The person affected by spinal cord injury is at the heart of everything Back Up does and every decision we make. Our work is led by need. Understanding published research into needs, together with our own research into the needs of specific groups of people, has helped to inform the way we deliver our services and what our strategy is for the future development of Back Up.

The schools and families inclusion service was set up in 2009 in response to research conducted by the Institute of Education into [The school lives of children and young people with a spinal cord injury](#) and continues to evidence the need by our own collection of testimonies. The two case studies below show the negative impact of when inclusive education is not practiced. In both situations, the young people, prior to their injuries had settled schooling where they were achieving academically and were part of an established and valued peer group. Yet while adjusting to a traumatic injury, they were not able to access their established networks, negatively impacting on their both their emotions and education.



**Louise Wright**

Back Up Chief Executive



## Case study 1

I was injured in 1972 when I was 13 years old. I became a paraplegic as a result of medical negligence. I was moved away from home into a boarding school, away from my twin brother. I saw my family every 3 weeks. I kept in touch with 3 school friends - they came to stay at my family home in the holidays. **Being separated from my family and friends was difficult. I used to pretend they didn't exist. Looking back, I realise that I was separated from everything I knew, so it was not surprising that I didn't cope well in the beginning.**

My parents sent me to boarding school because they wanted me to have a good education. They had little choice – the alternative was a local day school for disabled children where the education was very poor – the school only offered a few CSE's.

I'd been at a good grammar school in London with excellent teachers and resources. **It was before the days of inclusion of disabled children into mainstream schools and though my boarding school was better than most schools for disabled children it didn't compare with mainstream schools.**

Woman, 40

## Case study 2

I was injured through an accident on the gymnastic bars in 1979 resulting in a high level C 4/5 complete injury. I have minimal use of a splinted arm to control my electric wheelchair and use a mouth-stick and voice operated software for computer work.

**My parents were advised by social services that the only option was for me to be placed in a special school because of the level of care I needed and that the**

**school was not wheelchair accessible.** With that advice, they did so with every confidence that it was the right thing to do.

**Despite doing well in school previously, I left school with no qualifications.** I was cared for well physically, but academic achievements took a secondary role. I didn't question this but was very frustrated and anxious about what the future would hold; being disabled with no qualifications.

After leaving school my parents were advised to send me to a residential college for disabled people for further education. I attended the college for two years and left with three 'O' Levels. **The lack of qualifications made me feel disheartened and that there was no future for me.** Not satisfied with this, my parents contacted the local mainstream college, which I attended after adaptations were made. I gained a further five 'O' Levels and two 'A' Levels. I then moved into employment as a trainee Legal Executive. I am now qualified and have enjoyed 22 years in full time employment.

Looking back, **I am confident that not being able to return to my old school impacted negatively on my emotional well-being as a teenager. I spent several years thinking being disabled meant no future. I watched my peers gain qualifications and employment and developing in self confidence many years before me.** I got there in the end which shows with the right advice and support a devastating injury is not a barrier to a fulfilling career.

Tracy Moore, 32

## Resources

- **Altogether Better**: information pack on inclusion of disabled children and young people by Richard Reiser and Micheline Mason. It gives a thorough account of the history of inclusion, arguments for why we should work towards it and practical ideas on how it can happen.
- Knight, A, Petrie, P, Potts, P and Zuurmond, M. (2008) **The school lives of children and young people with a spinal cord injury**. Thomas Coram Research Unit, Institute of Education, University of London. Report to the Back-Up Trust.