

# beautiful lives

HOW WE GOT  
LEARNING DISABILITIES  
SO WRONG

A book by  
Stephen Unwin

Accessible  
Edition



**Beautiful Lives is inspired by Joey, Stephen Unwin's son.**



**Being Joey's dad has changed Stephen's life.**



**Joey has severe learning disabilities. He cannot speak.**



***Beautiful Lives* tells how the world has looked at people with learning disabilities.**



**There have always been people with learning disabilities.**



**This book asks how people with learning disabilities have lived.**



**In Britain today there are 1.5 million people with learning disabilities.**



**Every person who has learning disabilities is different.**



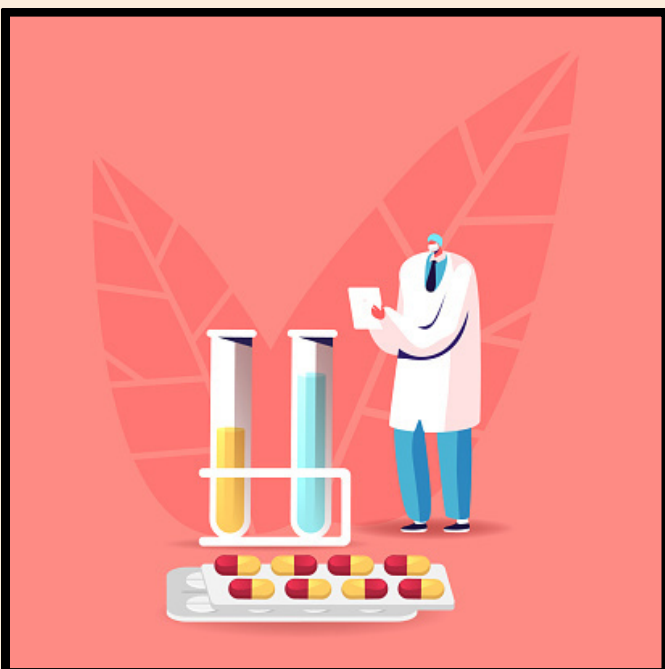
**People with learning disabilities need help to live safe, happy and healthy lives.**



**There are many causes for learning disabilities.**



**Most people with learning disabilities were born with them.**



**Learning disabilities cannot be fixed by medicine.**



**Learning disabilities,  
physical disabilities  
and mental illness are  
different.**



**Different words have  
been used to describe  
people with learning  
disabilities.**





**Sometimes, these words have also been used to describe people who did not have learning disabilities.**



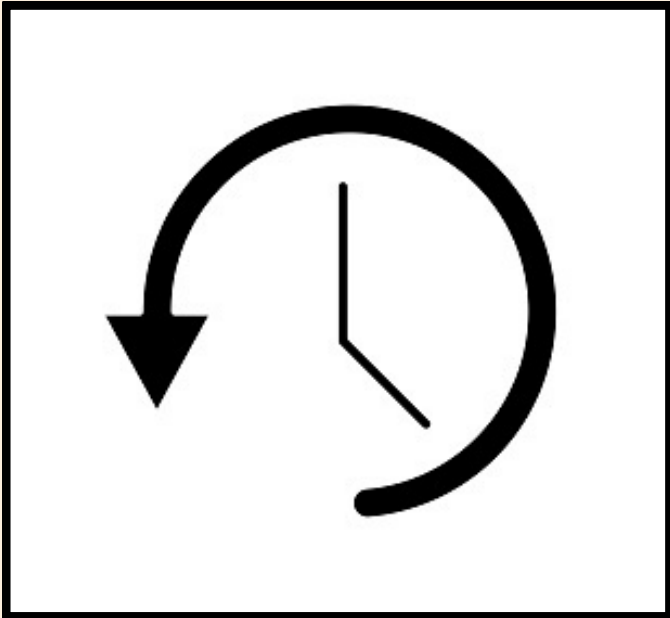
**Many of these words are now offensive**



**But these words weren't always offensive.**



**We know very little about how people with learning disabilities used to live.**



**Before 1800, people with learning disabilities were seen as 'innocents'.**

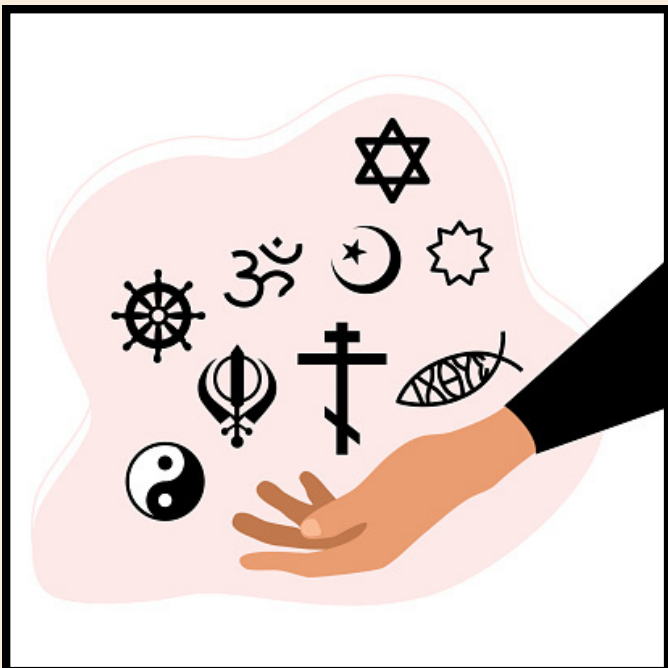


**They lived with their families and did whatever work they were able to.**





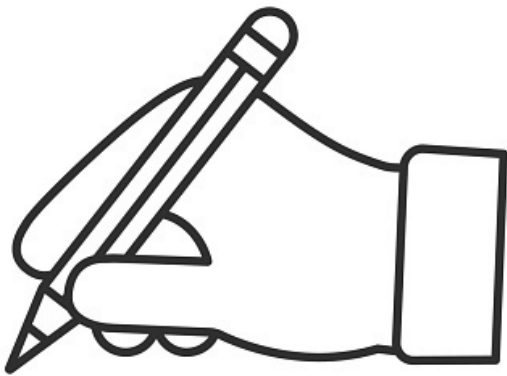
**Most of the time,  
people with learning  
disabilities were  
accepted as human  
beings.**



**They were often  
helped by religious  
charities.**



**However, in the 1800s, there were also some people who thought they were a 'menace' to society.**



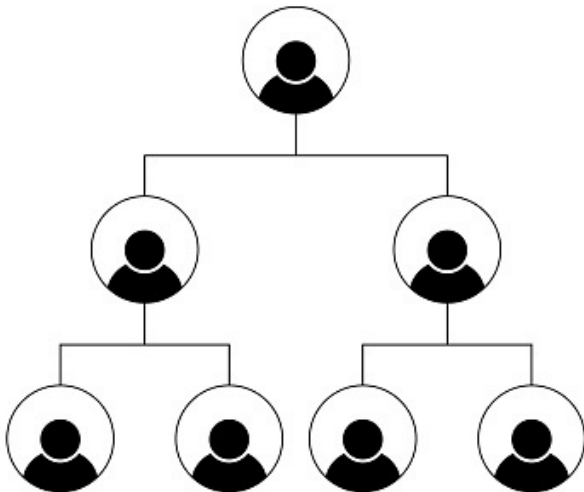
**Some of these were famous writers who said that people with learning disabilities were not fully human.**



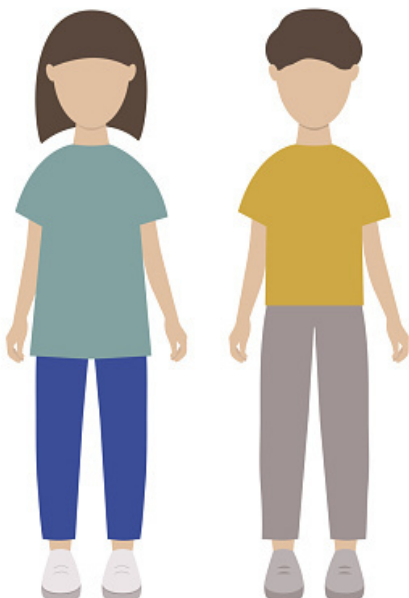
**Asylums started to open which soon became overcrowded.**



**Scientists started to believe that learning disabilities came from your mother and father.**



**They said that people with learning disabilities shouldn't have children.**



**They were often made to live separately so they could not have sex, or sterilized so that they could not have children.**



**In Nazi Germany, many people with learning disabilities were murdered.**



**After World War Two, people with learning disabilities were put in long-stay hospitals.**



**They were overcrowded and badly run. The care provided for those who lived there was poor.**



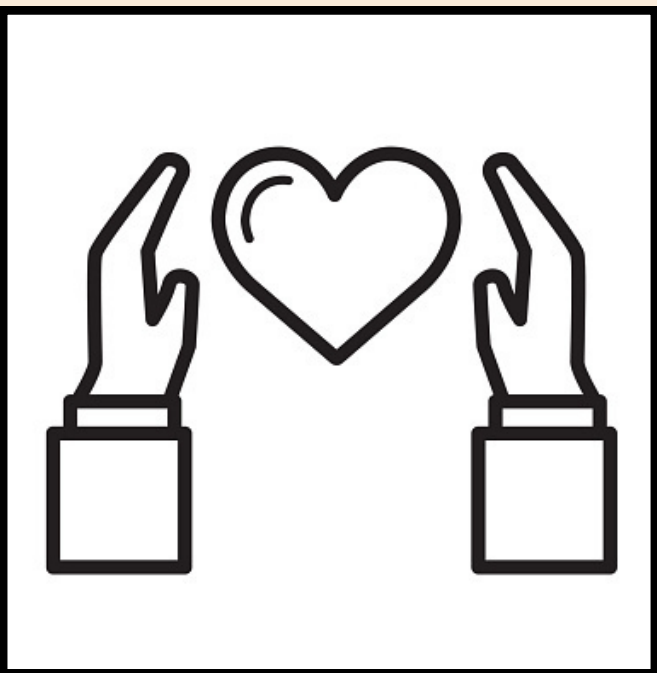
**These hospitals were finally closed down. The residents were moved into flats and houses 'in the community'.**



**But life in the community was not always better.**



**Various movements advocating for people with learning disabilities started to emerge.**



**The 'normalization' movement wanted people with learning disabilities to lead 'normal lives'.**



**'Normal' lives were better than terrible lives. But no one said what was meant by 'normal'.**





**The 'self-advocacy' movement argued that people with learning disabilities should be in charge of their own lives.**



**They say that people with learning disabilities should speak for themselves. They declare: 'Nothing about us, without us'.**



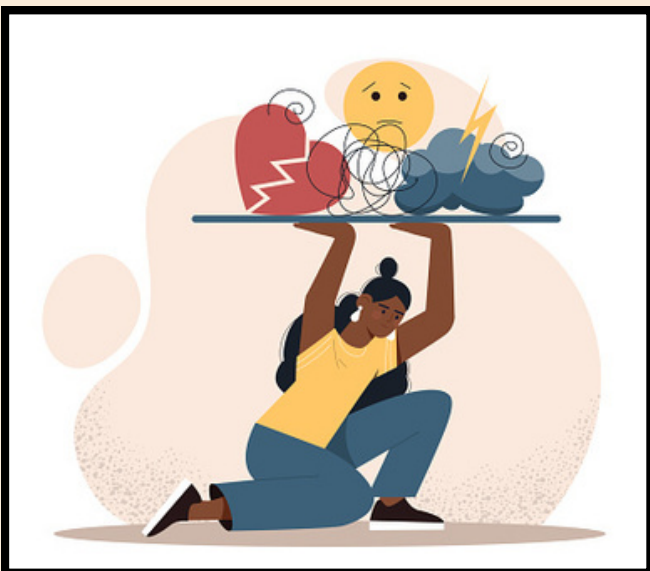
**But not everyone can speak up for themselves.**



**The lives of people with learning disabilities are better today than they were 100 years ago.**



**But bad things still happen to people with learning disabilities. Bullying is common – so is cruelty.**



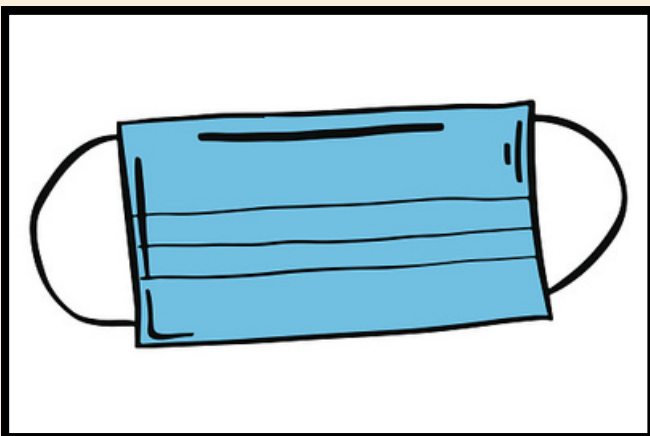
**People often get bad education, poor health care and not enough social care. Reports are often ignored.**



**Their rights are protected, but change is too slow. Families have to fight hard to get their loved ones what they need.**



**People with learning disabilities are not always treated well in hospitals.**



**Too many people with learning disabilities died of Covid-19.**



**Autistic people with learning disabilities are sometimes put into assessment and treatment units (ATUs).**



**However, bullying and cruelty can happen in both residential and supported living.**



**Sadly, some people have died.**



**People with learning disabilities deserve the same rights as everyone else.**



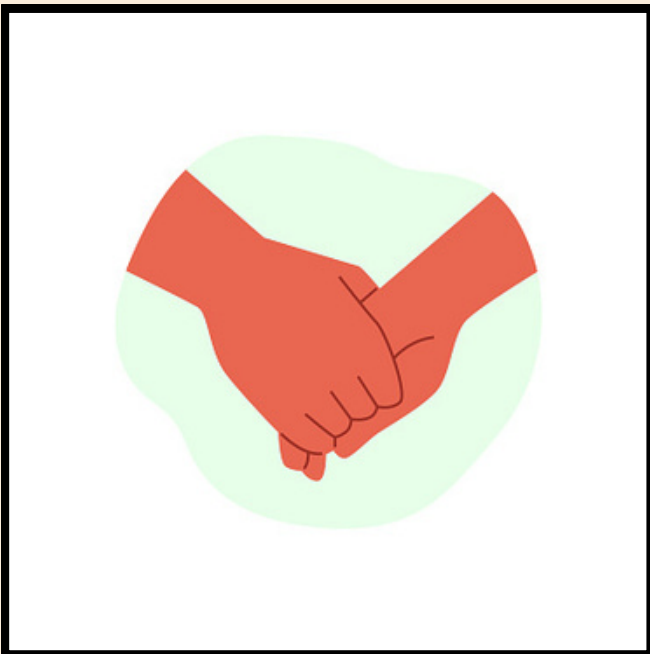
**It is time for people with learning disabilities to be accepted by society.**



**These days, scientists know a lot about the causes of learning disabilities**

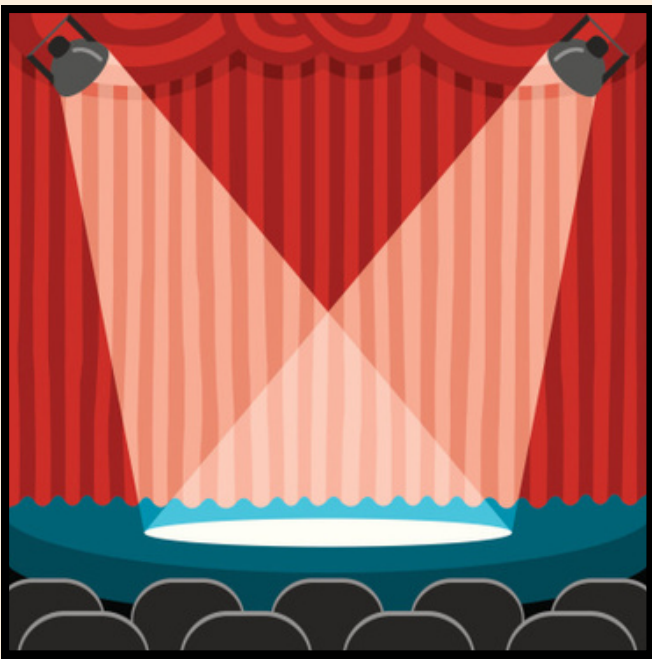


**Knowing can be helpful.**

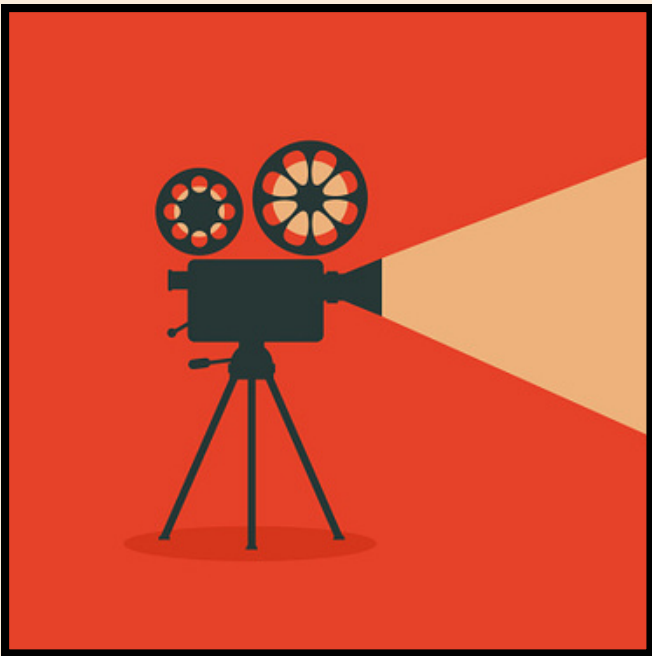


**But it is more useful to say what a person needs than give them a label.**





**Arts organisations have tried to include people with learning disabilities.**



**Film, TV and theatre have all tried to tell stories with characters with learning disabilities.**



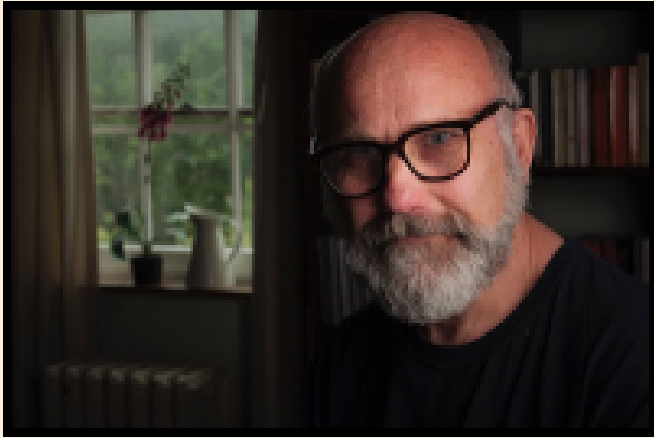
**Some have been successful. Some less so.**



**It is good that we  
continue to celebrate  
the things that people  
with learning  
disabilities do!**



**But people with  
learning disabilities  
often need help and we  
must make sure that  
this help is available.**



**This is Stephen Unwin,  
the writer of *Beautiful  
Lives*.**



**Stephen is a  
campaigner for the  
rights and  
opportunities of  
people like his son  
Joey.**



**He is also one of  
Britain's leading  
theatre and opera  
directors.**