

Daughters of Fortune: Stories of Parents with Learning Disabilities Research Easy Read Summary



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Why did we do this research?

- More people with learning disabilities are becoming parents. But people with learning disabilities can face extra difficulties when they become parents.
- This research was done with Mind the Gap, a theatre company for people with learning disabilities. They wanted to collect stories of parents with learning disabilities for their production, Daughters of Fortune.
- We want to share these stories of parents with learning disabilities with as many people as we can.

How did we do this research?

- Performers with learning disabilities from Mind the Gap interviewed parents with learning disabilities to find out their stories.
- They spoke to 5 mothers and 3 fathers. The parents came from the Leeds and London areas. The interviews were recorded and then written up word for word.
- Mind the Gap worked with a university researcher. The researcher read the stories over and over.
- Although each story is different, there are also some things that are similar about the different stories. These are called themes. The researcher looked at these themes in the different stories. This type of research is called 'Thematic Analysis'.

What did the research tell us?

- The 8 parents had 22 children altogether. Some had children as young as 2 years old, and others had children that had grown up and were adults. 7 out of the 8 parents had had their parenting skills assessed by children's services. 6 out of 8 had been separated from some or all of their children, either for some time or forever.
- Here are some of the main things that we learnt from the parents' stories. Some of this is in the parents' own words.

Wanting to be a parent

- Most people talked about how they had wanted to be parents for a long time.

"I always wanted kids... I always felt I was meant to be a mum."

- But some parents weren't sure if they would be good parents.

"I'd feel like I wasn't good enough... I didn't believe in myself."

- All parents talked about how happy they were finding out they were going to be a parent. Sometimes other people (like their family) were not as happy finding out about the pregnancy.

Being 'ready' to be a parent

- Some parents talked about planning their family. But some parents also talked about knowing even when they were pregnant that their baby may not live with them.

"We wanted to decorate her room, but given there was no guarantee we would be able to keep her, we felt we couldn't."

- Parents felt like they needed to prove themselves even early on. This felt unfair.

"You never know how ready you are to be a parent until you've got kids. So to say to people with special needs, you need to make sure you're ready before you try, that's already setting you up to fail."

Experiences of Services

- Lots of parents said it was important to ask for help from services.

“If you need help, get help, because there’s help there... Don’t do it on your own. It’s hard.”

- But parents did not always get the support they asked for.

“They said they would do a pre-birth assessment and the community midwife would give me parenting lessons after the child was born. Yeah, I was okay with that agreement... but it didn’t happen.”

- Parents felt like others, including professionals, judged them.
- Parents talked about fathers being left out more than the mothers of their children.
- When parents had good experiences of services, they talked about help being long-term, having professionals that believed in them, having advocacy and peer support groups.

Other people think that people with learning disabilities won’t make good parents

- Parents felt that others, like professionals, assumed from the beginning that people with learning disabilities couldn’t be good parents.

“They say learning disability can’t look after a child and they just assume straight away that you can’t look after your child.”

- Parents felt like they had to prove themselves.

“Because I’d changed it all around... And I proved I could do it.”

- Because of this pressure to prove themselves, parents felt like they needed to be even better than parents without learning disabilities.

“Because there are a lot of people that don’t have a learning disability that are really naff parents and they don’t have to go through all the social services.”

- Parents talked about feeling like they were treated differently than others without learning disabilities.

“They always look at us we’re like different... So we are good parents but we’re not having opportunities to be good parents because the attitudes are putting us in boxes... they’re just too eager to take the child away. You’ve failed, in their eyes you’re always a failure and that is wrong.”

Stories of strength and hope

- People talked about very difficult experiences in their journey as parents. But parents also talked about staying strong, trying to cope with these difficulties, and staying hopeful for the future.

“In life you go through things and they either break you or make you stronger. I’ve gone through too much; I didn’t lose my family to gain nothing.”

- Parents wanted professionals and others in the community to stop judging them as not being good enough because they have learning disabilities. Parents wanted other people to believe that, with support, people with learning disabilities can be good parents.

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